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LETTERS

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ADDRESSED TO A

SERIOUS AND HUMBLE ENQUIRER

AFTER

DIVINE TRUTH,

WITH A PECULIAR ASPECT

TO THE

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PRESENT TIMES.

479

BY THE REV. EDWARD COOPER,

RECTOR OF HAMSTALL-RIDWARE AND OF YOXALL IN THE COUNTY OF STAFFORD, AND LATE FELLOW OF ALL-SOULS COLLEGE, OXFORD.

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PREFACE.

In submitting the following Letters to the Public, the Author is desirous of stating that the sentiments contained in them are the result of much attentive consideration of the subjects which he has ventured to discuss. If his observations, in general, be just, as he believes them to be, he feels assured that they are both important and seasonable.

The design of this Publication is two-fold: First, to assist the serious and humble Enquirer in his search after Divine Truth; and, secondly, to promote the peace and harmony of the Christian Church.

The Writer has long been of opinion that the present state of the religious world opposes some considerable and peculiar difficulties to those who are anxiously seeking "the Truth as it is in Jesus:" difficulties, which, if they do not altogether divert them from their pursuit, yet greatly impede and retard their progress. It therefore occurred to him, that an attempt to assist such persons in surmounting these difficulties, and thus to facilitate their advancement in the acquisition of the Truth, might prove, through the Divine blessing, no unprofitable employment of the time and thought which the execution of such a work would necessarily require. This was the suggestion which induced him to make the attempt. The execution of it has unavoidably led

led him to touch on some of those controversies which of late have so greatly distracted the Christian Church: but in touching on them he trusts that he has not manifested a controversial spirit, nor expressed himself in a manner inconsistent with that peace and harmony, which it is another part of his object to promote.

As to this point, indeed, his attempt may be deemed superfluous. After so many unsuccessful efforts to unite the Christian Church, any additional endeavour may be characterized as savouring of folly and presumption. But the Author has not been deterred by the apprehension of such a charge from prosecuting his purpose: and if he dares in any degree to anticipate the attainment of his object, this hope arises, not from an overweening opi-

nion of his own penetration and sagacity, but from the chastised and moderate nature of those expectations which he ventures to indulge. It appears to him that many efforts have failed by aiming to accomplish too much. Impossibilities have been attempted; and disappointment has consequently ensued.

To entertain an idea, in the present state of human nature, of bringing all persons to an union of judgement and practice in religious matters, would be a speculation, which the experience of eighteen hundred years has proved to be visionary and absurd. Such an union the Writer has no hopes of ever seeing accomplished. The utmost, which in his opinion can reasonably be looked for, is a union of spirit; such a union as results from a disposition

sition to bear with the infirmities, prejudices, and ignorances of others; to tolerate a difference of opinion without regarding those who differ, with sentiments of jealousy and suspicion; to indulge mutual sympathies; cordially to co-operate in every good work; and thus to "keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Such an union is the utmost which can be looked for: nor can any reasonable expectation be entertained that even this union will ever be universal. The violent, the bigotted, the intolerant, together with all those who are governed by party-spirit and by an immoderate regard to the exclusive interests of their own religious community, will always dissent from an union so repugnant to their feelings and prejudices. But to hope that true

true Christians may thus unite in spirit and disposition; that all those who "love the Lord Jesus in sincerity;" and have "drunk of the same spirit," may come to a right understanding on their respective differences, and love one another with a pure heart fervently, this is surely no extravagant speculation, no wild, chimerical hope: for it is only to look for the manifestation of those fruits which true Christianity is capable of producing; and which, when left to exert its own native energies, it naturally will produce. Such an union between such persons is a practicable union; for it is an union to which their mutual principles spontaneously incline them: and therefore, the attempt to promote it is a rational attempt.—Such, then, is the union which the Author

has in view: and if in attempting to promote it, he shall be made instrumental in bringing nearer together any of the divided sheep of Christ's flock, and in leading them more closely to combine against their common foes, his end will be in a great measure answered, and his "labour not in vain in the Lord."

It remains only to say a word on the *form* in which this publication appears. The epistolary mode has been preferred, as being in the Writer's judgement the best adapted to his purpose, as affording him the greatest facilities for introducing and obviating objections, and as tending a little to relieve the heaviness and uniformity of a more systematically didactic composition. There are many serious Enquirers after Divine Truth

to

to whom these Letters might have been written; and it is humbly hoped that every person of this description, into whose hands they may happen to come, will consider them as addressed to himself, and derive as much benefit from the perusal of them as the supposed correspondent is represented to have done.

HAMSTALL-RIDWARE,
April 26th, 1817.

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LETTER I.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

YOUR letter has afforded me singular satisfaction and delight. I rejoice to find that you are seriously enquiring after divine truth; and apparently with that sincerity, candour, and teachableness, which alone can ensure success in such an undertaking.

It is from the want of these dispositions, that so many utterly fail in their search after religious wisdom. They come to the study of divine things, with a mind already pre-occupied by favourite notions, and biassed by its own peculiar propensities; and not as you represent

to be your own state, with an anxious desire of discovering the truth, 'wherever it may be found, and whatever preconceived opinions it may oppose; and 'with a sincere resolution, in dependance 'on Divine grace, of embracing the truth 'thus discovered, and of obeying it, whatever losses or sacrifices you may be 'called to endure for its sake.'

I trust that you are correct in this representation of yourself; and I am strongly disposed to presume that you are so from that ingenuous and unprejudiced simplicity, which, with one exception, pervades and characterises your whole communication. And it is this presumption which induces me the more readily to comply with your request of assisting you in the object of your search; for if you have really those sincere and humble dispositions, which I give you credit for possessing, I am well assured that they must be the production of the Holy Spirit of God, from whom alone such dispo-

sitions

sitions can proceed; and who therefore among the means, which he thinks fit to select, may render my attempts instrumental in furthering his gracious purposes to your soul. Truly happy and thankful shall I feel, if he is pleased thus to employ me, and to make my services on this occasion acceptable to himself and profitable to you.

The difficulties in your search after the truth appear to you to be greatly augmented by the peculiar circumstances of the times in which you are placed. You see the religious portion of the community broken into a variety of discordant parts, each thinking itself to be right, and tenacious of its own opinions: one division holding one extreme of doctrine, and one another: yet both perhaps arrogating to themselves the title of the true disciples of Christ. You witness a great profession of Christianity; but among those who make it, you notice many things which surprise and offend you;

many inconsistencies, irregularities, and extravagances; many pretensions which cannot be supported; many practices which cannot be justified. And what is the result? Distracted by this variety of incongruous objects, this multiplicity of contending claims; finding so much dissension where you might have hoped for unanimity, and so many things to be disapproved and censured, where you might have expected nothing but what would have been satisfactory and commendable, you are at a loss how to proceed. The investigation of the truth seems to be opposed by almost insuperable obstacles; and you are disposed to conclude that the attainment of it was never so difficult as under existing circumstances. Such a conclusion is very natural; and had you lived in any age of the church, you would probably have entertained the same opinion. The peculiar difficulties of the time would have appeared to you far greater than those of any preceding period;

period; and for this obvious reason, because they would have been the difficulties with which *you yourself* would have been called to contend. I introduce this remark merely for the sake of reminding you, that the attainment and profession of the truth have always been attended with difficulties. No period has been exempt from them. They may have differed in kind, but probably in degree they have been nearly equal. At the same time I readily admit that those of the present day, which you feel and lament, are difficulties of a peculiar kind, and of considerable magnitude: difficulties, which greatly obstruct the humble and serious enquirer after divine truth; and which therefore it is of great importance to assist you in surmounting, or altogether to remove.

Nor is there, in my opinion, any better or more effectual way of fortifying you against a conclusion so inimical to your peace of mind, and so prejudicial to your

growth in grace, as the one which these difficulties appear to have suggested to you, than by endeavouring to point out the quarter from whence they have originated, and the purposes for which they are designed.

I need scarcely remark to you, because you yourself seem aware of the fact, that during the last twenty years a very considerable revival of religious feeling and profession have taken place among us. Those dreadful convulsions, which were doubtless intended by the secret instigator of them as means of extending and establishing the kingdom of darkness, have through the divine mercy been over-ruled to a very different purpose. Christianity, instead of having sunk under the assault of infidelity, seems to have gathered strength from the conflict. A new impulse has been given to the public mind. A new interest has been excited in it. The world has seemed to awake out of its spiritual slumber. An increased attention

to

to the means of grace, to public ordinances, to the word of God, to the religious wants of our fellow-creatures, has rapidly and widely diffused itself throughout every part of the community, and has imparted to the age in which we live, a novel and peculiar character. Several institutions of different descriptions, formed for the beneficent object of disseminating at home and abroad, in Christian and in heathen countries, the knowledge of divine truth, are supported with a liberality and zeal, which strongly indicate the increasing influence of religious impressions, and promise to be productive of consequences the most important to the temporal and everlasting interests of mankind.

These are facts, which every the least attentive observer cannot but have remarked; and which every devout and Christian mind will regard with satisfaction and thankfulness. But how are they regarded by the great enemy of

God and man? In what light do we suppose, that he views this revival of religious feeling, this diffusion of the word of God, these vigorous and united efforts to disseminate the blessings of Christianity throughout the world? Doubtless he regards them with jealousy and hatred, as so many instruments employed in opposition to his interests, and for the subversion of his kingdom. And can we suppose that he will suffer these attempts to proceed without endeavouring to impede their progress, and to frustrate their operations? Scripture and experience alike preclude such a supposition. The history of the church, has been a history of Satan's reiterated, however ineffectual, attempts to oppose the power, and to defeat the gracious purposes of Christ. We have no recorded account of any efforts to revive the cause of God in the world, of any fresh interposition of the Spirit to advance and enlarge the kingdom of the Messiah, but we find new

and

and augmented exertions on the part of Satan and his emissaries to resist these efforts and to counteract this interposition. And can we suppose that his conduct in the present instance will be an exception to his general proceedings? Is his malice extinguished? Has his opposition to Christ ceased? Different indeed have been the instruments, which at different times, and under different circumstances he may have employed for carrying on his opposition. Persecution, though the most frequent, yet has not been the exclusive, or perhaps even the most successful weapon of his warfare. He has accomplished more by subtlety, than by force: and the secret introduction of heresies, corruptions, and dissensions, has done more real injury to the church of Christ, than the openly hostile operations of fire and sword. What then in modern times, and under present circumstances, might we have previously conjectured would be the

modes of attack, to which recourse would be had? Precisely such, I presume, as we actually see to be employed. To have endeavoured to oppose the revival of religion and the diffusion of scriptural truth, by arming against them the civil power, would have been a fruitless effort. The world was not in a state to countenance or tolerate such a measure; and the enemy, we might reasonably have judged, would be too wise to attempt it. He would obviously have recourse to other expedients, more adapted to the circumstances of the times, and would pursue his object by some more promising means. To sow dissensions and foment divisions; to draw away the attention of mankind from matters of prime importance to objects of secondary and inferior moment; to engage them in angry, protracted, and unprofitable controversies on non-essential points; to take advantage of the weakness of some religious professors, and of the insincerity

cerity of others; to seduce some into inconsistent practices, and others into extravagant pretensions; and thus by these various artifices to bring discredit on the doctrines of the Gospel; to dispirit the hearts, and weaken the hands of the true servants of Christ; to discourage the humble enquirer after divine truth; to increase the incredulity of some, and to confirm and strengthen the prejudices of others—these were doubtless the instruments, which, with a very little previous knowledge of the character and designs of our spiritual enemy, we might have justly expected him to employ. And are not these the very instruments, which he is employing? Do they not constitute the very difficulties, of which you complain? And is not the conclusion, suggested by them to your mind, the very conclusion, which he intends and hopes, will be impressed by them? One of the obvious effects which he designs to accomplish by this dis-

union and confusion, by these controversies and offences, is to induce a persuasion, that the attainment of divine truth was never so difficult as under existing circumstances, and consequently to discourage the prosecution of an object, which amidst such contradiction and disorder it is, as he would intimate, almost hopeless to pursue.

I trust that by this time you are sensible of the nature of this suggestion, and see it to be a temptation, which it is both your duty and interest to resist. And happily the same considerations, which have served to detect its poisonous qualities, furnish also a very effectual antidote against them. The malice of Satan in this instance, as in many others, defeats its own purpose. His very attempt to resist and confound the truth, betrays his conviction of its importance, and the fear which he entertains of its success. If in the present revival of religious profession there were not a real

attack made on his kingdom and power, why should he be thus active in defending himself? Why should he so industriously have recourse to all the means which have been enumerated, for counteracting and paralyzing the endeavours of those, who are labouring to disseminate and increase religious knowledge and feeling among us, did he not evidently perceive the tendency of those endeavours, and secretly dread their effects? Why should he so anxiously labour to deter you from seeking the truth, did he not certainly know, that they who seek shall find? Be assured that this is the real state of the case. Draw this legitimate conclusion from the premises, and thus meet and foil your enemy with his own weapons. Look on the difficulties which seem to oppose your search after truth, as the clouds and mists with which he has purposely enveloped it, in order to conceal it from your sight, and to prevent you from pursuing

suing it. Thus, instead of being discouraged by the obstacles in your way, be excited by them to more active exertion. Be convinced that there is indeed a pearl to be found; a pearl of great price, and within your reach; otherwise so much pains would not be taken by your greatest enemy to prevent you from finding it. I shall endeavour as our correspondence advances, to assist you in the attainment of this hidden treasure. In the mean time,

I am, &c.

LETTER II.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In my last letter I endeavoured to show you that those controversies, dissensions, and offences, with which the religious world unhappily abounds, are some of the obvious effects, which, on a revival of religious profession, might antecedently have been expected to result from the power and malice of the spiritual enemy; and consequently that whatever obstacles they may put in the way of the serious enquirer after divine truth, are so far from furnishing any rational ground for discouragement, that they supply him with even additional incentives to vigorous and ardent exertion. In the present letter I purpose to consider the subject in another light. I wish you to see, that the existing state of things, which so greatly distracts and distresses you, is in reality a wise dispensation

pensation of Providence, appointed for very important purposes. I wish you to see, that while the author of all evil is permitted, by this introduction of disorder and confusion into the visible church of Christ, to expose and gratify his own malignant dispositions, The Lord, who sitteth in Heaven, is secretly over-ruling all these attempts for the purification of his real church, and is employing them as instruments in his hand for the improvement and manifestation of his true people, and for the detection and exposure of the unsound and ungodly professors of his faith. If I shall be able to establish this position to your satisfaction, I trust that the evils in question, however deeply to be deplored, will not retain in your eyes that formidable appearance, which they have hitherto assumed.

There is in the truths of Scripture, when fully and faithfully proclaimed, a quickening influence, an awakening energy, which will not suffer mankind to continue

continue in their usual torpor on the subject of religion. In proportion as the truth is distinctly exhibited, attention is roused, and the feelings of the soul are called into action. In some persons enmity is excited, and opposition ensues; in others conviction is wrought, and approbation follows. Thus a separation gradually takes place. Men range themselves on opposite sides; and the Gospel of peace becomes, through the influence of the carnal mind, the instrument of division. Among those, however, who appear to favour and embrace the cause of truth, a wide distinction of character still exists. All who follow the camp are not Israel. There are tares among the wheat. Much base alloy is mixed with the pure ore. And since such a state of things seems naturally to result from a revival of religion, this single reflection might serve in some measure to reconcile you to the evils, which you witness.

But though the good and the bad may thus

thus for a season be mixed together in this world; yet we know that a decisive and final separation will be made between them hereafter. The wheat will be severed from the tares. The ore will be purified from the alloy. The sincere servant of Christ will be distinguished, and set apart from the unsound professor of Christianity. The act indeed, by which this separation will be completed, takes place in the next world; but the circumstances, on which the decision will be founded, occur in this. The present life is the scene of probation. Here the trial is begun and carried on. Here the sincerity or the insincerity of the professor of Christianity is put to the test. Here the touchstone is applied, by which it is to be proved, whether his faith be real and genuine: whether it be the living principle, which overcomes the Devil, the World, and the Flesh; which is deeply connected with humility and works by love; the gift and the operation of the Spirit

Spirit of God: or whether it is only a specious appearance, destitute of spirit and vitality; a mere creature of the imagination; a base counterfeit, which cannot endure the fire; a profession, which, having no root, in time of temptation withers and dies. This is the trial, which takes place in the present world; and it is in subserviency to this trial that the Lord orders and controls the course and dispensations of his providence. Hence we shall find that the times distinguished by a peculiar revival of religious interest, have most frequently been attended by circumstances of peculiar trial and temptation. In proportion as a larger diffusion and profession of the truth have made a larger measure of probation necessary, the instruments for effecting this purpose have been provided and multiplied. Among these instruments, persecution has been often employed for putting the vitality of faith to the test, and for ascertaining the sincerity or the insincerity of a reli-

a religious profession. When men have been required to testify their love of the truth by suffering for its sake; when an avowed and a persevering attachment to the cause of Christ, has exposed them to the loss of property, of liberty, or of life; it is obvious that trials of this nature must have tended to detect the unsound and nominal Christian, who would not be prepared to purchase at such a price the continuance of his hope; while they would equally evidence the soundness and integrity of those principles, by which the true believer would be induced to "take joyfully the spoiling of his goods," and "not even to count his life dear unto himself, so that he might finish his course with joy," and hold fast his profession unto the end.

But persecution has not been the only instrument, by which the Lord has tried the faith of his church. He has often made use of other means. The profession of an unsound and hypocritical faith will indeed

indeed be overcome by the fear of man, and by the dread of suffering. But there are also many other modes of temptation, against which it will be equally unable to stand; and by which its unsoundness and hypocrisy will be equally detected and exposed. To a heart not established with grace, a corrupt system of doctrine, offering a gratification to pride, to lust, to covetousness, or to some other propensity of the carnal mind, will form a temptation equally fatal with any other, by which it might be exercised. Preferring error to truth, such a heart will insensibly be drawn away from the purity of the Gospel; and thus will betray its own obliquity, and the unsoundness of its religious professions. And with this statement, the declaration of the apostle to the Corinthian church agrees: "There must be heresies among you, that they which are approved, may be made manifest among you."

In this view, then, of the subject, what in reality are those evils, by which Satan is permitted

permitted to disfigure the face of Christianity, but so many instruments, which in this season of religious light and profession, are purposely employed and overruled for the purification of the true church, and for the separation of the sound from the unsound professors of the faith? And let us observe how wisely and effectually they are adapted to the promotion of this important object. Let any person in these times apply himself to the study, or take up the profession of religion; and how certainly will he, sooner or later, encounter some erroneous system of doctrine, by which his heart, if it be not right with God, will inevitably be seduced, and its corrupt bias discovered. Under the garb of Christianity, does a man still retain a proud and an unhumbled soul? For such a person the real doctrines of the Gospel can possess no attractions. Though he may, in some degree, be convinced of the importance of religion; yet, the self-renunciation, the poverty of spirit,

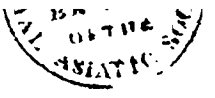
spirit, the meekness of temper, the teachableness of mind which true Christianity prescribes, find nothing congenial in his heart. Repelled therefore by a system of religion, which promises him so little gratification, he is ready to adopt some other scheme of doctrine, more suited to his corrupt inclinations; which, allowing him to retain self-righteous principles, a dogmatical spirit, and a haughty temper, may provide him with an easy way at once of satisfying his conscience, and of indulging his favourite dispositions. Such a system he finds already prepared for him. The temptation is suited to the peculiar state of his mind. Yielding to it, he becomes a vehement advocate of the doctrines which he has espoused, an angry and overbearing disputant; while he practically and essentially impugns the spirit of that religion which he professes to uphold. Again, another man, though calling himself a servant of Christ, is still under the influence of a vain and an aspiring

aspiring temper, fond of distinction, and loving to have the pre-eminence. What congeniality can there be between such a man and the religion which he professes? How do the divine precepts of "taking the lowest place," and "becoming the servant of all," accord with the state of his mind? The unassuming conduct, the unostentatious obedience, the modest, lowly, and unobtrusive habits which the Gospel enjoins, are directly opposed to his predominant feelings and desires. When, therefore, any scheme of religion is proposed to him, which offers to gratify his prevailing inclination; to confer on him the distinction which he covets; to exalt him to the eminence which he loves: what is the consequence? His heart is not proof against such an assault. In time of temptation he falls away. The selfish principles, by which he is governed, not unfrequently, even here, betray him into gross and offensive inconsistencies; and when brought to light hereafter will

most

most decisively evince the insincerity of his religious profession.—Let us turn our eyes on another character; on the man, who applying to himself the promises and privileges of Christianity, but not convinced of the malignity and desert of sin, still indulges a secret propensity to sensual gratification. His faith is not that holy principle, which would lead him to crucify the flesh, to mortify the deeds of the body, and to cut off the offending member. Does such a man then, in the circle of religious profession, discover a sect or a system, which separates privilege from duty; which requires from him no other evidence of his being in Christ, than a firm persuasion that he is so; which thus avowedly frees him from the burdensome operation of self-restraint and universal obedience: can he resist a temptation so adapted to the state of his unsanctified heart? No. He readily falls into the snare which Satan has been suffered to spread for him. He runs into licentious

doctrine and practice. By the irregularities of his conduct, he exposes the fundamental deficiencies of his religious character, and proves that he has never been a *real* member of the Body of Christ. — I will detain you with only one additional illustration of the subject. Let us represent to ourselves another character; a man, who, though not disgracing his profession of Christianity by any immoral or extravagant conduct, yet has no spirituality of mind. While he believes the letter of Scripture, and adheres to the form of godliness, yet his heart still retains its original enmity to spiritual and holy duties. The deep corruption of his nature, and his utter alienation from the life of God; the necessity of his heart being renewed unto holiness, and the spiritual nature of those sacrifices and services which God requires of him, are doctrines, of the truth of which he has no corresponding experience within. His faith is not really the gift and operation of the Spirit



Spirit of God. And how, then, does he stand the trial? He falls, as we have seen the others fall. He finds, like them, a system suited to the particular bias of his unrenewed heart, and willingly espouses it; a system, which allows him to substitute forms and ceremonies for holy services: which connects the future rewards of piety to the mere performance of outward duties; and which permits him to believe that he is a Christian, for the same reason that the descendant of Abraham believed himself to be a Jew, because he was one outwardly in the flesh, while destitute of that inward faith and holiness which marked the patriarch's character, and distinguish all his spiritual children.

I trust that these illustrations are sufficient to explain and prove the position which I am endeavouring to establish. I think you must see that those evils, which we mutually lament and would gladly diminish, yet become in the hand of the Lord means and occasions of good. He,

who causes the wrath of man to praise him, makes also the malicious designs of his spiritual enemies to subserve the purposes of his Grace. He turns these devices of Satan into instruments for sifting his professing people, and for distinguishing the chaff from the wheat, preparatively to that solemn and everlasting separation which shall finally take place between them. We cannot indeed but grieve that so much chaff should even now appear; but let us not be so occupied with surveying the refuse as to overlook and forget the wheat. Let us not be so engrossed with contemplating the dissensions, the inconsistencies, and the extravagances of the unsound professors of Christianity, as to overlook and forget the real and faithful members of Christ's mystical body. Yes: let us remember that among these false and nominal Christians, there is intermingled a number of the true servants of Christ, who, having received from him a principle of living

faith, are enabled to avoid the snares, and to overcome the temptations with which they are surrounded: who, being humble, holy, spiritual followers of the Lamb, are now serving him acceptably with reverence and godly fear; who now through grace maintaining their integrity, and evidencing their sincerity in his sight, are sharing the happiness and privileges of his people on earth, and are daily ripening for the glorious inheritance reserved for them in heaven. Such people there undoubtedly are. And I trust that the time will not be long, before you will be added to their number; and by your own experience of their character and privileges will yourself bear testimony to the truth and fidelity of my description. Your apparent sincerity and teachableness induce this hope respecting you; and earnestly do I trust, that He who hath begun a good work in you, will perfect it unto the end.

I am, &c.

LETTER III.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I AM glad to find, that my letters have proved satisfactory to you, and that by your own confession you begin to look upon the state of the religious world in a light different from that in which you lately saw it. For my own part, the more attentively I consider it with the Bible in my hand, the more exactly do I perceive it to correspond with that state in which I should expect to find it, until a more copious effusion of the Spirit shall have been vouchsafed to the church, and "the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ."

There is one respect, however, in which you think my statement of the subject open to objection. It seems in your opinion to lead to a severe and an uncharitable

charitable judgment on the state and character of others. You say that, according to my views, I must 'necessarily condemn, as an unsound and insincere 'professor of Christianity, every individual who is not perfectly correct in 'the scheme of doctrine which he embraces.'

To this objection, I would reply by reminding you, that though I indeed referred to the case of individuals, yet it was only for the sake of illustrating the general subject under review. I was speaking not of individuals, but of principles; and the sum of my remarks amounted only to a declaration, that those persons, who, from the bias of an unrenewed heart, are induced to espouse a corrupt or defective system of doctrine, are strangers to the simplicity which is in Christ, and are under condemnation. And surely, in such a declaration, there is nothing which is either severe or uncharitable. It is only a repetition of the

Scriptural sentiments and assertions, that "a deceived heart hath turned them aside;" and that they, whose "heart is not right in the sight of God," are "still in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity."

But though I state these things, it is far from my purpose to insinuate, that every individual, who embraces a corrupt or defective system of doctrine is, therefore, in the sight of God, an insincere professor of religion. I am willing to believe that persons, whose hearts are really under the influence of the Spirit of God, yet from a variety of causes, — from want of information, or weakness of judgement, from early prepossessions or the insensible bias of party-feeling, — may be led to adopt and adhere to a scheme of doctrine, in which a considerable portion of error is intermixed. And therefore, so long as persons professing even such a doctrine, do not manifestly betray, in the habitual state of their temper, spirit, or conduct,

conduct, any thing decidedly inconsistent with the Christian character; so long as they are preserved from the practical evils into which their system of religion would naturally lead them; I would, in this case, charitably ascribe their erroneous views to any of the causes abovementioned, rather than to the unrenewed state of their heart: and I would hope that, however misguided and mistaken in their notions of some Scriptural truths, they may yet be sincere and spiritual believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But while I thus cast over persons of this description the veil of charity, yet I cannot "give to them," as professors of religion, "the right hand of fellowship;" nor "wish them," in this character, "God speed." I cannot hold them up as objects for imitation, as patterns and specimens of that standard to which true Christianity aspires. If I can hope, that in the end they will be saved, it is not *because* of the erroneous doctrines which

they profess, but *notwithstanding* the profession of them. Regarding them on the most favourable construction, as having "built on the foundation merely wood, hay, and stubble," I can only believe that they will be saved, if saved at all, "as by fire." Whatever hope may be entertained, that, through the vitality of the principle implanted in their hearts, they will not ultimately perish; yet still it must be felt, that such characters present at the best but a very doubtful and mysterious aspect. Our hope concerning them must always be checked by fear, and our charitable sentiments be damped by apprehension.

Having thus obviated, as I trust, the objection to which you thought my statement liable, I shall devote the remainder of this letter to the explanation of a subject, to which I incidentally alluded on a former occasion, and concerning which you have expressed a wish that I would give you some information.

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I had said, that one of the instruments which Satan might have been expected to use, for obstructing the cause of truth, was, the engaging men in angry, protracted, and unprofitable controversies on non-essential points! You ask me, in reference to this passage, 'What *are* non-'essential points?' and, 'Whether *all* 'controversies on these points are un-'profitable?' To these questions I will endeavour to reply.

The points, which I intended to describe by the term *non-essential*, refer to matters both of Faith and of Practice. And first, with respect to matters of Faith.

In any system of religion, adapted to the present condition of human nature, the great object which it would profess to accomplish, must be to recover the soul of man out of its fallen state, and to restore it to a capacity for finding happiness in the service and presence of a Just and Holy God. Consequently,

whatever truths such a system proposes, the belief of which it should prescribe as *absolutely necessary* to the accomplishment of this object, would be *essential truths*. They would be truths, an assent to which would be indispensable to the salvation of the soul. But such a system might also contain many other propositions, either plainly declared in it, or by deduction and inference supposed to be fairly derived from it: propositions, which though in themselves abstractedly true, yet might not be insisted on as articles of faith. They might be truths, the assent to which would *not* be absolutely necessary to the accomplishment of the great object in view; and which therefore in this light must be justly esteemed and denominated *non-essential truths*.

Now, such a system is Christianity. Such is the object, which it professes to accomplish: and in the accomplishment of this object it discloses certain truths,

to

to which it absolutely requires the assent of all who would be benefited by its operation. These are fundamental truths, the belief of which the Scriptures declare to be necessary for the recovery and restoration of the soul. Without believing them, no one, to whom the light of Revelation is vouchsafed, can participate in the remedy provided. These, therefore, in the Christian system are *essential truths.* But in the same system there are other propositions, more or less plainly expressed in the word of God, or supposed to be deduced from it,—propositions, which, though they may in themselves be equally true with those which have been already mentioned, yet in one respect materially differ from them. They are not proposed to us as articles of faith, the belief of which is *necessary* for our recovery to a state of peace and holiness, and to which, therefore, we are compelled to assent, in order to our being saved. They are propositions, on which

which a difference of opinions may be entertained, without involving consequences fatal to the end which Christianity has in view. Hence they may be regarded as entitled to a greater or a less degree of consideration and importance without in the least affecting the general grounds on which our salvation rests. And in this light they must be considered, if truths, yet as *non-essential* truths.

The same distinction which thus belongs to matters of faith, may be shown to exist in matters of practice also. In addition to those universal rules of obedience, which (as resulting from the natural relation between the Creator and his intelligent creatures) are of eternal and immutable obligation, Christianity enjoins certain other specific duties in subserviency to its general design. These being prescribed by positive institution are, under this dispensation of religion, equally binding with the requisitions of the moral law. Of this kind are the observance

observance of a day of holy rest, the attendance on public worship, and the administration of the Sacrament. All which duties being expressly enjoined as means to be used by every one, who desires to partake the blessings of the Gospel, are "generally necessary to salvation," and consequently *essential* to be practised.

But there are also other matters of practice, which come to us under a different form and character. They are matters concerning which no decisive and specific directions are given in Scripture, and in respect to which therefore no positive commands can be pleaded. Of this kind are the mode of conducting public worship; the peculiar form of church-government; the manner in which the Sacraments ought to be administered; whether baptism, for instance, should be performed by sprinkling or by immersion; whether the Lord's Supper should be received in a sitting or a kneeling posture. These are matters of practice, which are left

left to the exercise of human judgement, to be regulated in such a way as may appear best adapted to their respective purposes, and most conducive to general edification: but not being matters on which the Scriptures have authoritatively decided, they may be regarded, in reference to salvation, as *non-essential.*

And thus I hope, that I have satisfactorily answered your first question. By non-essential points I intend to signify *those truths,* which, though possibly deducible from Scripture, are not necessary articles of faith; as well as *those modifications of practice,* which, not being expressly defined in the Word of God, are left to human prudence and regulation.

With respect to your second enquiry on this subject, 'Whether *all* controversies 'on these points are unprofitable?' I do not hesitate to reply, that in my judgement they are not. Some of these points refer to matters of deep importance and of much relative interest to the Christian Church,

Church, and are therefore fit subjects for serious and temperate discussion: and so long as such discussions are conducted in the spirit and temper which Christianity requires, and are kept within those limits to which they ought to be confined, far from being unprofitable, they may be productive of many beneficial consequences. But when these preliminary conditions are overlooked or infringed, when a diversity of opinions on these subjects is advanced and maintained in an angry and a contentious manner, with unchristian tempers and a dogmatical spirit; when the points in dispute are invested with a greater degree of importance than, after all, really belongs to them; and when they are suffered to engross so large a portion of the public mind as to eclipse or obscure objects of vital and essential interest; then such controversies become, not only unprofitable, but greatly injurious to the cause of true Christianity.

These were the controversies to which I alluded;

I alluded; and respecting which I cannot but repeat my observation, that I consider the promotion of them as one very powerful instrument, which Satan too successfully employs for opposing the progress of truth, and for maintaining his own empire in the world.

I am, &c.

LETTER IV.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

HAVING now, as I hope, a little cleared your way, and removed out of it some few of the most obvious difficulties, I proceed to the consideration of other topics suggested in your original communication. Among these, the first which offers itself, and perhaps the first in interest and importance, relates to the Calvinistic controversy,—a controversy which, from its commencement, has greatly agitated the Christian world, and in our own days has engaged a large portion of the public feeling and attention. In reference to this subject you very decidedly profess yourself to be on the anti-Calvinistic side of the question; and in strong terms avow your conviction, that the Calvinistic doctrines are destitute of Scriptural foundation,

tion, as well as highly pernicious in their practical consequences to those who espouse them.

By the Calvinistic doctrines, I take it for granted, that you mean those which are strictly so called, and which exclusively belong to that peculiar system, which the term Calvinism implies. Possibly you may deem this observation superfluous; but I have two reasons for making it.

In the first place, I have often remarked that much of the confusion, in which theological controversies have been involved, has arisen from a misunderstanding of terms, through the want of proper definitions. The parties engaged have omitted to state the clear and precise sense in which they have used particular phrases and expressions; and the consequence has been, that a protracted discussion has taken place, and no small loss of time, and perhaps of temper, has ensued, which a little previous explanation might in a great

great measure have prevented. Using the same term in different meanings, the disputants have mutually misunderstood and misrepresented each other; and thus have too often widened a breach, which it was their professed object to close. I am therefore desirous, in the very commencement of the subject, to provide against any unnecessary misunderstanding between us, by distinctly stating the sense in which I myself interpret, and suppose that you interpret, the term Calvinism. I am the more anxious on this point, because,

In the second place, there is scarcely any term, which in modern times has been so misapplied as this has been, and used in a sense either so indefinite, or so foreign to its original meaning. Instead of having been restricted to the peculiarities of the Calvinistic system, it has been applied to all those essential doctrines of Christianity, which Calvinists hold in common with other professors of evange-

evangelical truth: and many persons have been reproached with the name of Calvinists, whose opinions have had no nearer connection with the exclusive tenets of Calvin, than those of the persons who cast the reproach. That this misapplication of the term may have sometimes originated from inattention, inaccuracy, or defective information, may be readily supposed; but that it has not at other times been studiously adopted with the express design of throwing obloquy on some offensive doctrine, or on some theological opponent, cannot be conceded without ascribing to the parties who have so misapplied the term, a portion of ignorance, of which they could not reasonably be suspected. As for you, I believe that you are too well informed to understand this term in any but in its precise and legitimate meaning: and I am sure that you are too honest to use it in a base and disingenuous manner.

The doctrines, then, to which I understand

stand you exclusively to refer, are those, which are purely Calvinistic; and the passage, in which you speak of these doctrines, is the part of your letter, to which I alluded as not affording me satisfaction. Not that I am dissatisfied with your taking the anti-Calvinistic side of the question, or have any intention or wish to induce you to change your views: my dissatisfaction arises merely from the decided and positive language which you use on this occasion, and which appears to me quite inconsistent with that anxious desire of discovering and embracing the truth wherever it may be found, which you profess and appear generally to feel. I must remind you that such a profession does not suitably accord with an avowed positiveness of opinion on points, which have so long been matters of "doubtful disputation;" and on which it is probable that you have at present bestowed only a very cursory and superficial examination. On such points a truly candid and sincere

enquirer

enquirer after truth will be slow in forming a decisive opinion. He will proceed with caution; and, instead of hastening to a precipitate conclusion, will endeavour to divest his mind of prepossession and prejudice, and to keep it open to the impressions of sound reason and argument.

Had you acted in this manner, I think that you would not have expressed in such strong and positive terms your conviction respecting the unsoundness of the Calvinistic doctrines. On this subject let me propose to you one point for serious consideration. Have you ever duly appreciated the weight of testimony in favour of these doctrines, which is furnished by the number of learned and pious persons, who, in different ages of the church, have espoused and maintained them? Human authority, indeed, can be no justification of error. The Christian is to call no one master upon earth. The Scriptures are the only foundation of his faith;

faith; and from these alone his doctrines are to be derived. But with all these concessions on the one hand, it must yet be admitted on the other, that it is possible for human authority to have considerable weight in the determination even of a doctrinal question. It may, for instance, be a matter of doubt, whether any alleged proposition be contained in Scripture or not. The premises, on which it is supposed to rest, are to be examined. The legitimacy of the conclusions resulting from them, is to be put to the test. The general connection and analogy of the proposition in question, with the other declarations of Scripture, are to be investigated and ascertained. Surely in a case of this kind, the testimony of persons generally competent and qualified to judge, in support of such a proposition, would be a presumption in its favour; while that presumption would evidently be strengthened in proportion to the *degree* of competency and qualification which

the persons in question were known to possess. If they were men distinguished by profound theological learning, by eminent and highly-cultivated talents; if they were remarkable for their Christian attainments and their exemplary piety; the united suffrage of many such characters to the truth of the proposition in dispute, ought surely to have its proper influence on every pious and considerate mind. Such a suffrage, indeed, could not set aside any positive declarations of Scripture. It might not be sufficient to overthrow any contrary conclusions, which had been formed on the subject: but unquestionably it ought to lead any one, who had formed such conclusions, to admit a suspicion, that those of his opponent might possibly rest on a firmer foundation than he had hitherto imagined.

Let us apply this reasoning to the Calvinistic doctrines, and see whether the advocate for them may not put in a strong presumptive claim in favour of the Scriptural

tural foundation of his tenets, from a review of the high authorities which he can adduce in support of them. May he not appeal to the examples of a Hooker and a Beveridge, of a Leighton and an Usher, and say, If such men, such divines as these, so eminent for their learning and piety, with minds so replete with Scriptural knowledge, so imbued with evangelical truth—if *they* admitted the doctrines under discussion, if they believed that personal election and final perseverance are truths revealed and maintained in Scripture; it surely was not on light and trifling grounds, that *such* men came to these conclusions. They would not have espoused these doctrines, unless they had believed them to be contained in Scripture, nor would they have admitted this belief, unless they had seen, or thought they had seen, sufficient and satisfactory grounds for making the admission. Let persons then, who are of opinion that these doctrines are without foundation in

Scripture, yet abate a little from the positiveness and tenacity with which they adhere to such an opinion, by reflecting on the number and the character of those, who, possessing information and capacity confessedly of the highest order, have yet maintained a contrary conclusion. Let the conclusions of such men be treated at least with that candour and deference, to which their acknowledged learning and piety, their attainments and talents, so eminently entitle them.

But to this statement you will perhaps reply, that if human testimony be allowed to have weight on the one side of the question, the same allowance must be conceded to it on the other. Do we not witness among the opponents of Calvinism men distinguished also for their learning and piety, for their attainments and talent? And, 'Is not the authority 'then (it may be asked) of those who 'deny any foundation for these doctrines 'in Scripture, a sufficient counterbalance

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'to that of the persons who maintain 'them? Is not testimony on the one 'side neutralised by testimony on the 'other? Are not the present advocates 'of these doctrines deprived of the be- 'nefit which their cause might be sup- 'posed to derive from the eminent names 'adduced in its support, by the eminent 'names which may be adduced in oppo- 'sition to it?' To these questions I think we must answer in the negative. For the circumstance that eminent persons have denied these doctrines, however reasonably it may be alleged to countenance and justify those who agree with them in opinion, yet cannot disannul the simple fact, nor destroy the conclusion resulting from it, that such men as Hooker and Beveridge, as Leighton and Usher, *did* believe that these doctrines were founded in Scripture. That others maintain an opposite opinion proves, indeed, that the same subject may be viewed by different persons in different lights;

lights; that different conclusions may be drawn by different persons from the same premises; but it cannot prove, that those who take either side of the question have no tenable grounds for the sentiments which they espouse. In an unsettled and disputable point, a variety of circumstances may operate to prevent any two men from thinking alike: but for one of them to say to the other, 'My 'opinion is the right, and *therefore* you 'have no foundation for yours: I see 'the matter in this light, and *therefore* 'you cannot reasonably see it in any 'other;' is to assume the very point in dispute, and to arrogate to himself the claim of infallibility. An humble and a candid disputant, however convinced of his own conclusions, will yet be disposed to allow, that possibly he may not do full justice to an opponent's cause. Aware of the unperceived influence, which prejudice and predilections, which peculiar associations and habits of thought exert

exert even in the strongest mind; aware that this influence is powerful, in proportion as it is unperceived, he will readily admit, that he may not himself feel all the weight, nor duly appreciate the full force of those arguments which are advanced against him. He will accustom himself, especially on subjects of an abstract nature, to suspect the absolute conclusiveness of his own opinions: he will learn to hold them with moderation, and to advance them with diffidence.

I may have dwelt longer on this point, than may have appeared to you to be necessary; but it strikes me as one which is very important in itself, and to which, adequate attention has not been paid by the anti-Calvinistic party. A consideration of the high authorities, by which the doctrines of personal election and final perseverance are supported, ought at least to correct that positive and overbearing language, in which these doctrines are often impugned; and should

remind those, who thus impugn them, that the opinions of such men, as many of the Calvinists have been, are not to be encountered by flippant and dogmatical assertions, without exposing the authors of them to suspicions as unfavourable to their talents and learning, as to their candour and modesty.

I am, &c.

LETTER V.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

WHILE you express yourself so far convinced by the statement in my last communication, as to allow that you have spoken on the subject of Calvinism with a decision and positiveness, for which you have no sufficient warrant; you at the same time cannot but consider some of my positions in that letter as liable to objections of a very serious nature.

'To assert (as you express yourself) 'that so many men of talent, learning, 'and piety, have deduced from the same 'Scriptures conclusions so directly con-'trary on points of such importance as 'those under review, is to advance a 'very dangerous hypothesis; inasmuch as 'it tends, indirectly at least, to insinuate 'that the Scriptures are indistinct and

'indefinite in their exposition of divine
'things; and consequently that the word
'of Revelation, which is designed, and
'professes to be an unerring guide in all
'matters concerning salvation, instead of
'conducting us into the paths of truth,
'only leaves us more deeply involved in
'the mazes of doubt and uncertainty.
'For (as you proceed) the contrariety
'between these conclusions can only be
'removed on the supposition, that the
'Divine pre-determination asserted by
'the Calvinist is reconcilable with the
'freedom of agency, for which his oppo-
'nent contends as essential to human
'responsibility. But this supposition in-
'cludes in itself an evident contradiction.
'It requires us to believe that two lines,
'which are obviously parallel to each
'other, either commenced from the same
'point, or converge to the same extre-
'mity. Truth must lie on the one side
'or on the other. If one of these doc-
'trines be absolutely and abstractedly
'true,

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'true, the other must be absolutely and 'abstractedly false.'

These objections are in their nature so formidable, and lead to consequences so injurious in their general tendency, as well as so prejudicial to your religious progress in particular, that I am anxious without loss of time to enter on the discussion and refutation of them.

In asserting the contrariety of opinions, which learned and pious men have entertained on the Calvinistic doctrines, I merely stated a fact, which is notorious, and which can be neither denied nor concealed. Whatever consequences, therefore, may be supposed to result from this contrariety, must be chargeable on the fact itself, and not on any assertion of it. But do *those* consequences, which you are disposed to infer, really result from this fact? That men, eminent for their learning and piety, have held very different views of Scriptural doctrine on the subject of personal election and final

perseverance is most certain: and therefore that the Scriptures *in this particular point* may be indistinct and indefinite in their exposition of Divine things, is an inference which may possibly be just. But does it follow from hence, that the word of Revelation is not an unerring guide in matters essential to salvation; or that in *such* matters it leaves us under any doubt or uncertainty?

Before I can admit such a conclusion, I must beg leave to remind you of my answer to a former question, and of the distinction which I endeavoured to lay down between essential and non-essential points. If the view which I then took of the subject was accurate, and the line which I attempted to draw, is correct; you must be aware that before your conclusion can be established, it will be incumbent to show, that the belief or the rejection of the Calvinistic tenets is represented in Scripture as absolutely necessary to salvation. For unless this

necessity

necessity be proved, it will follow that these tenets themselves (admitting them to be founded in Scripture) are to be ranked only among the *non-essential points* of Christianity: and consequently a discrepancy of opinion concerning them may very widely prevail without any the slightest imputation against the Scriptures as being either defective and obscure in their expositions, or inadequate as a guide into all necessary truth.—And this I believe on examination will be found to be the real state of the case. For though I must readily acknowledge, that from the zeal with which these tenets are frequently obtruded and insisted on by the one party, and from the warmth with which they are as frequently opposed and decried by the other side, we might be led to infer that the respective advocates regard the adoption of their own peculiar views as a point essential to salvation:—that the espouser, for instance, of the Calvinistic system excludes from among the heirs

heirs of salvation, all those who do not believe the doctrines of personal election and final perseverance; while the anti-Calvinist thinks that no one can be saved, who maintains these offensive tenets:—yet I am persuaded that on enquiry we shall find such an opinion to be practically erroneous; we shall find that the most strenuous partisans on both sides of the question (with very few exceptions) would instantly reject any such uncharitable conclusions; and would be ready to concede, that, however zealous and warm they may be in defending their respective opinions, they do not mean to establish such a partial system as would exclude those who differ with them, from the hope of salvation. I think that such would be their mutual concession; and in making this concession they both would substantially admit, that the doctrines of Calvinism are among those non-essential points, which may be either believed or disbelieved, without affecting the

the real foundation on which the salvation of the soul depends.

Such I firmly believe would be the result of a reference to the parties in question; and such I feel confident will equally be the result of an appeal to the Scriptures themselves.

Let us remember that Christianity comes to us as a remedy for sin. It proposes to recover us from the ruins of the fall. The soul, having by sin lost the Divine favour and image, is under a twofold disability for participating that happiness, which is to be enjoyed in the sight and service of a holy God. It is bound over to punishment by the condemnation of His righteous law, and is shut up under the bondage of a depraved and corrupted nature. From this state of ruin and misery the Gospel reveals a way of deliverance. It tells us, that the price, at which this deliverance has been purchased, is the blood of Jesus Christ: while the remedy, like the evil, is two-

fold, corresponding to the guilt and corruption, from which it undertakes to recover us. In virtue of the price paid for redemption, the free gift of justification is substituted for the sentence of condemnation; and the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit are vouchsafed to free the soul from the dominion of sin. Such is the remedy provided.

But how is this remedy to be applied? How are we to secure and appropriate to ourselves the blessings of this great salvation? The Scriptures expressly tell us, by believing on the Redeemer, through whom it has been purchased—"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"—"He that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life; he that believeth not on the Son of God, shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"—"God gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him, should not perish, but should have everlasting life." These texts plainly teach

us, that faith in Jesus Christ is that one qualification, on which the Scriptures insist as essential to salvation. The having or the not having of this faith is that single circumstance, which makes the whole difference in our spiritual state. If we have this faith, we are freed from condemnation and corruption: if we have it not, we still remain under the power and bondage of these original consequences of sin. If we would be saved, we *must* believe in Jesus Christ. And from hence it follows, that whatever truths are necessarily contained in this one comprehensive requisition of believing in Jesus Christ, are truths which must be received as in themselves essential to salvation. To represent any one of them as a proposition, the belief of which is not indispensably required of all who would be saved, would be to incur the aweful responsibility of "taking away from the words of Scripture:" while on the other hand, to insist on any doctrine as

essential

essential to salvation, which is not necessarily included in this general declaration, would be to make an addition to the Word of God, and to the Scriptural terms of salvation. What, then, *are* those truths, which are *necessarily* comprehended in the general declaration of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ?

It is obvious that such a belief includes two things,—first, a *conviction* of those evils, in a recovery from which salvation itself consists; and secondly, a *persuasion* of Christ's ability to recover us from them: in other words, a *conviction* of our misery as sinners, and a *persuasion* of the efficacy of Christ's mediation in our behalf. As without this conviction, we should never seek salvation at all; so without this persuasion, we should never be induced to seek it of Christ. Of what truths, then, do this conviction and persuasion *necessarily* comprehend the belief? Of the depravity of our nature, and of our guilt as sinners; of the divi-

nity,

nity, incarnation, atonement, and resurrection of Christ, in which the efficacy of his mediation consists; and of the energies and operations of the Holy Spirit, by which our recovery is begun and advanced, and our restoration to the Divine image and likeness will be completed. These, then, are *essential* truths, the belief of which is necessary to salvation. It does not appear possible, if we reject any of these truths, to participate in the blessings which Christianity proposes: and consequently, with respect to all these truths, the Scripture is full, explicit, and decisive. It constantly interweaves them into every part of Revelation, and uniformly assumes them as established and fundamental truths, which no one who receives the Bible as the word of God, can overlook or disbelieve.

But what shall we say of the Calvinistic tenets? Even on the supposition that they are Scriptural truths, yet how will

will they stand the application of this test of their importance in the scale of Christian doctrine? Are the doctrines of personal election and final perseverance *necessarily* included in the general declaration of believing in the Lord Jesus Christ? Is a belief of these doctrines *necessarily* implied in that faith in Christ, by which we obtain salvation? For my own part, I can discover no implication of this kind: nor does the nature of the case, nor do the statements of Scripture require the admission of it. Though I might possibly be chosen of God unto salvation before the foundation of the world; and though it might be unchangeably fixed that I should never fall away from my profession of faith in Christ; yet it would not therefore necessarily follow that I must *believe* these things in order to my obtaining a saving interest in Him. The propositions might be perfectly true; but the *belief* of them would not be *essential* to

my

my salvation. If, under a feeling and lively sense of my guilt and corruption, I should believe with the heart on the effectual mediation and sacrifice of the Divine Saviour, I should clearly possess that one qualification which the Scriptures represent as both necessary and sufficient for salvation; and consequently I should be in the way of salvation, though at the same time I might be a stranger to the doctrines of the personal election and the final perseverance of the Saints. And if any one should urge on me the belief of these doctrines as an indispensable requisite to my being saved by Jesus Christ, he would be urging on me the belief of doctrines, which, however true they may be in themselves, and however Scriptural in their foundation, yet are not insisted on in the Scriptures as *essential* doctrines. He would be adding to the terms of salvation enjoined in the word of God, by insisting on my assent to doctrines which are not

necessarily

necessarily included in that one scriptural requisition, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ."

On the other hand, if, while I cordially believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, I should also hold the Calvinistic tenets, would the Scriptures on this account condemn me as one who disbelieved the truth, or maintained false doctrine? Would they represent my assent to these tenets as making void my faith in Christ, or as vitiating all, or any of the benefits resulting from that faith? I find in the word of God no representations of this nature. As it does not require me to receive these tenets in order to my being saved, so neither does it exclude me from salvation for receiving them. It teaches me that if I believe in Jesus Christ, I shall be saved. On this point the Scriptures are clear. No mistake is possible. No alternative is left to me. I must believe or perish. But they teach me nothing as to the *necessity* either

either of receiving or of rejecting the Calvinistic docrines with a view to my salvation. On this subject they speak not decisively: and in what light, then, are we taught, indirectly at least, to regard these doctrines, but as *non-essential* points, which may be either held or rejected according to every one's private judgement, without affecting the real foundation on which his salvation rests?

Thus we are again arrived at the same conclusion; and if this be a just statement of the case, I think you must be ready to admit, that your objection to my positions, as tending to invalidate the testimony of the word of God, and to destroy its character as an unerring guide into all necessary truth, is erroneous and unfounded. For in fact, the only point on which I represented the Scriptures as possibly speaking without precision and distinctness, is one, which cannot, by any testimony that they themselves advance, be proved essential to salvation; and

and on which, therefore, no necessity exists for their being distinct and definite. I shall resume the subject in another letter.

I am, &c.

LETTER VI.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

On resuming the subject of my last communication, I would recomend you to bear in mind St. Paul's statement of the object and sufficiency of the sacred Scriptures. He says, that they "are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Jesus Christ." To impart to us the knowledge of every thing, which it is essential for us to know, in order to our being saved by faith in Jesus Christ, is their object; and for the attainment of this object they are sufficient. They are "*able* to make us wise unto salvation." But while they thus undertake to provide us with all necessary information, they do not undertake to furnish us with any

 that

that is unnecessary. They do not profess to indulge our curiosity, or to gratify our speculative dispositions, by unfolding to us mysteries, which we are not profitably concerned to know. They plainly tell us, that there are "secret things," which "belong not to us but to the Lord;" and that our business lies with "those things which are revealed;" and which are revealed on purpose, that we may make a practical use of them, and may turn them to a good account. Thus while the Scriptures disclose to us (as we usually denominate Christianity) a *system* of religion; yet they do not deliver it in a systematic form; neither do they pretend to mould and perfect it into such a shape, nor so to adjust and proportionate all its relative parts as may correspond with our ideas of perfection and proportion. Those parts of the Divine counsel, the knowledge of which, in this our present state of pupilage and probation, is necessary for enabling us to emerge

emerge out of the ruins of the fall into happiness and glory, are so plainly revealed to us, that, comparatively speaking, "he may run that readeth them." But as to the other parts, clouds and darkness are still round about them; and though here and there we may catch, or think that we catch, some detached and partial glimpses; yet, after all the light which we can thus obtain, so imperfect is our knowledge; so little able are we to penetrate the vail which still conceals a large portion of the Almighty's wondrous plan; so totally incompetent are we to judge of the relations, which the parts that are disclosed bear to those which are hidden from our sight, that an habitual and avowed conviction of our own ignorance seems best to become us in our present state. And if we do not altogether refrain from discoursing on such mysterious subjects; yet surely we should speak on them with diffidence, humility, and reverential

tial awe, lest we expose ourselves to the charge of "darkening counsel by words without knowledge."

And excuse me for saying, that I think you have laid yourself a little open to this charge by the decided and peremptory language, which you have used in the passage already extracted from your last letter. You speak of the doctrines of the Divine pre-determination and of the free-agency of man, as of two parallel lines, which never can meet: and from hence you infer, that as one of them only can be absolutely and abstractedly true, so the other must be absolutely and abstractedly false.

This is the substance of your statement, in reference to which I wish to submit to you the following remarks.

That the doctrines in question, on an exclusive regard to one of which the Calvinistic and anti-Calvinistic schemes are founded, do *appear* to us to be as parallel lines, I am ready to admit. But

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are we sure that they *really* are what they appear to be? Is it not possible, that the appearance which they thus assume in our eyes may be occasioned partly by our own defective sight, and partly by the limited and contracted view which we here obtain of them? Is it not possible, that they may really converge towards each other, though, from these causes, their approximating tendency may at present be imperceptible to us; and that, in some distant and indefinite point, beyond the reach of our vision, they may actually unite? I ask whether such a possibility may not exist? At the same time, do not suppose that, by asking you to make this concession, I wish to adopt or to countenance any of those ingenious subtleties, or metaphysical distinctions, by which the advocates for some favourite system may have endeavoured, by separating the foreknowledge of God from His pre-determination, to reconcile the certainty of

contingent events with the freedom of human agency. I assure you that I have no wish or intention of this kind; for all such attempts have, in my opinion, utterly and decidedly failed. They all, in fact, proceed on the assumption, not merely that the difficulties of this abstruse and mysterious subject may possibly be capable of admitting some satisfactory solution, (the very possibility I am requesting you to concede,) but that the *precise mode* in which this solution is accomplished, may even now be discovered and comprehended by the penetration and intellect of man; — that the two lines (to revert to your illustration) not only may and do unite at some distant point, but that the *precise* point at which this union is effected may, even now, be distinctly seen and described by human powers. But from this assumption I totally dissent. I must freely own, that the difficulties of this perplexing question appear to me, on every hypothesis

pothesis which has been hitherto advanced, utterly insurmountable by man; and such, I believe, they must continue to be, so long as the faculties of man continue in their present state. But that these difficulties may possibly hereafter be surmounted, — that at some future period the pre-determination of God may be clearly seen to harmonise with the free-agency of man, is an assumption which, as it appears to me, no serious and considerate mind can deliberately deny. For though it may be true, that we cannot at present see "*how* these things can be" — that we can now neither discover nor comprehend the *mode* in which such a harmony can be effected; yet it cannot be reasonably asserted, that our inability to discern this *mode* is any decisive proof that it does not really exist.

In advancing these opinions, I am aware how openly I may seem to expose myself to the charges of contradiction

and absurdity: and you may probably persist in declaring, that to hold the doctrine of Divine pre-determination, is virtually to renounce that of human responsibility: for that these things cannot subsist together. But my assumption is, that these things *may* possibly subsist together: nor in maintaining this assumption do I feel that I am really exposed to any stronger charge of inconsistency than that, to which the apostles themselves were liable: for that *they* maintained this assumption, that *they* did not regard the pre-determination of God as in itself utterly irreconcileable with the responsibility of man, the following passages unquestionably evince. Peter, speaking to the rest of the disciples on the treachery and fate of Judas, says, "Men and brethren, this Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." The

same

same apostle, in his discourse with the Jews on the day of Pentecost, thus addresses them: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles, and wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know, Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." And again, on another occasion, the whole company of the apostles lifted up their voices to God with one accord, and said, "Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that in them is: who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus,

whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done."* In these several passages the Divine pre-determination with respect to the transactions mentioned is expressly admitted and avowed by these inspired men. But no attempt is on this account made by them to exonerate the parties concerned from their responsibility and guilt. On the contrary, their wickedness is strongly and decidedly charged upon them, notwithstanding that the crimes which they had committed, were the necessary means of accomplishing those very events, which the counsel and foreknowledge of God had determined before should take place. We cannot suppose that the apostles were ignorant of the difficulties which these statements involved. We cannot sup-

* Acts, i. 16.—ii. 23, 24.—iv. 21—28.

pose

pose them not to have perceived that the two views, in which they thus exhibited this mysterious subject, presented a seeming contradiction; yet we see that they were not deterred from making this exhibition, by any fear of being charged with inconsistency. They did not indeed attempt to reconcile these apparently opposite propositions, that 'the Almighty pre-determines events,' but that 'men are responsible for their 'conduct in accomplishing them;' but they evidently proceeded on an assumption that such a reconciliation at least is possible; and that to maintain this possibility is not necessarily to incur the charge of contradiction and absurdity.

The fact is this. The human understanding has its prescribed and appointed limits; which it cannot attempt to transgress without plunging into a sea of inconclusive and unfathomable speculation. So long as man confines the operations of his mind within the province assigned

to it, and exercises its powers on subjects, the data of which are placed within its reach, he may be able to arrive at safe and legitimate conclusions. But when he transgresses these bounds, when he proceeds to the investigation of matters, *parts only* of which are now within his present knowledge or comprehension; when he proceeds to speculate on those works and counsels of the Almighty, *of which a portion* only is at present revealed to him, it then becomes his wisdom and duty to suspend his judgement, and, instead of hastily and presumptuously pronouncing his decisions, to wait until further light shall be vouchsafed to him; until he shall no longer "know only in part, but shall know even as he himself is known."

Permit me to elucidate the subject of this letter by an illustration which suggests itself to my mind.

That God on the one hand is infinitely just, and will by no means clear the guilty,

but

but that on the other hand He is infinitely merciful, and will pardon the chief of sinners, are two propositions which, abstractedly considered, appear totally irreconcileable one with the other. When taken by themselves they seem like to parallel lines, which can never meet; for in what point, however remote, according to our understandings, could infinite justice and infinite mercy so approximate as to be harmoniously exercised together? Insuperable difficulties must seem to stand in the way of such an union. From Revelation, indeed, we know that these difficulties have been surmounted. In the Gospel we are made acquainted with that astonishing plan, the combination of almighty wisdom, love, and power, by which these discordant and opposing attributes of justice and mercy have been honourably reconciled; by which God has at once manifested himself to be Just, and yet the Justifier of every sinner which believeth in Jesus. On this point, therefore,

fore, we feel not the difficulties in question, because by the death of Christ they have been taken out of the way. But let us suppose that this event had not as yet occurred, nor any solution of these difficulties had been hitherto vouchsafed. Let us suppose that the Scriptures had only disclosed to us the two propositions above stated, without affording us any clue by which the mysteries involved in them could have been satisfactorily unravelled. How should we have been affected by the disclosure? How should we have regarded the propositions in question? Aware of the difficulties which they offered, should we have endeavoured, by some scheme of our own invention, to remove or overcome them? Should we have attempted to reconcile these seemingly irreconcileable attributes of the Almighty, by presuming (as all those who now reject the doctrine of the cross do presume) to magnify one divine perfection at the expense of another, and to shew that God is less than in-

infinitely just, in order to represent him as a Being who delighteth in mercy? We know by experience how inadequate such a mode of solving the difficulty would have been; how dishonourable to God, as well as insufficient for man, would have been any such scheme of human device for reconciling the attributes of the Godhead. We now distinctly see, not only that such a reconciliation would have been an object altogether beyond our utmost power to accomplish, but that the very attempt to accomplish it would have been a mark of folly and presumption. It was the Almighty himself alone, who could unravel the mystery and vindicate his own perfections. Should we, then, have taken another course? Struck with the seeming contradiction of these opposing propositions, should we have adopted the mode which you have followed on the Calvinistic subject, and have confidently pronounced that as both propositions could not be true, so one of them

them must obviously be false? Should we have positively declared, that they *were* two parallel lines which never could meet, and that therefore to receive them both as true would be an evident absurdity?

Need I remind you, if such had been our reasoning, how unsound and fallacious it would really have been? Need I remark to you, how bordering on profaneness and impiety would such language have now appeared to us? Surely under the circumstances supposed, it would have been most becoming us, as ignorant and fallible creatures, to have received with meekness and submission the propositions announced to us; and however incomprehensible they might appear, to have patiently waited till the Lord should further unfold to us his mysterious purposes, on the assumption, that propositions which may seem contradictory to us, may not really be so to Him.

I am, &c.

LETTER VII.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

If the train of argument, which I have been attempting to pursue, has wrought on your mind the effect, which it appears to me adapted to produce, you will now be disposed to concede somewhat more to the claims of the Calvinists than you have hitherto done; and to listen to their pretensions in favour of their peculiar tenets, with increasing moderation and forbearance. In my opinion, indeed, no Calvinist can soberly and rationally maintain that the doctrines of his own peculiar system are exhibited in Scripture in such a light as to authorise him in endeavouring to impose them on others, or in requiring that all persons should adopt his views on this myserious subject. If he would

would be consistent with his own principles, he cannot presume thus to dogmatise to others: but must feel himself constrained to regard with charitable sentiments such as on these points conscientiously differ from him. The same indulgence, however, which he extends to others, he has a right to demand for himself. He has a right to say to his opponents, 'Since we do not condemn 'you, nor in our judgement exclude you 'from the benefits and privileges of 'Christianity for not holding these doc-'trines in common with us: so we rea-'sonably expect that you will not be 'severe in your judgement, nor condemn 'us for maintaining opinions, which we 'believe to have a clear foundation in 'Scripture. Candidly consider our proofs. 'See whether they can be fairly and 'honestly refuted. Give us credit for 'possessing as much sincerity and pene-'tration as you claim for yourselves. 'Nor impute to our opinions conse-

'quences

'quences of which we do not perceive 'the necessity; and in which, on a sub-'ject so incomprehensible to man, it is 'possible that you may yourselves be 'wholly mistaken.' Such is the claim which, I think, the advocates for the Calvinistic doctrines may reasonably advance, and which those who differ from them, cannot justly refuse to grant. For if they should be unwilling to concede so far, they would betray on their part an evident disposition to prescribe to others in matters of faith; and would manifest such an overweening partiality in favour of their own opinions, as must utterly disqualify them in the judgement of every candid and considerate person, for arriving at any accurate conclusion on so involved and delicate a subject.

But you spoke in a former letter of the injurious tendency of the Calvinistic doctrines. You represented them as 'highly pernicious in their practical 'consequences to those who espouse 'them.'

'them.' In this view and representation of the case, you are not singular. Many concur in opinion with you. Many regard the tenets in question as hurtful in their moral effects; as tending to fill men with pride and self-conceit, and contempt of others; as generating in them spiritual sloth, a presumptuous confidence, a neglect of the means of grace, and an inattention to moral and relative duties. These are practical evils, which in the opinion of numbers naturally result from a belief in the doctrines of Calvinism. But does not this opinion in a great measure originate from a mistaken conception of what Calvinism is? Does it not proceed from a confusion of mind on the subject, and from uniting together two things which have no real connection with each other? Those who would impute all these practical evils to the operation of Calvinism, appear to suppose, that the belief of the Calvinist, by which he admits the doctrine of personal election,

tion, necessarily includes also an assumption of his own election. They identify his conviction of the Divine pre-determination with an enthusiastic assurance, that he is himself predestinated to eternal life. But such an assurance forms no part of true Calvinism. The Calvinist, properly so called, is no enthusiast. He makes no pretensions to any peculiar revelations, nor professes to derive information from any other sources than those which the Scriptures furnish. He believes, indeed, in the eternal purposes of God as to the salvation of the elect; but as to the hope of his own salvation, and of his individual interest in those purposes, he professes to obtain it in no other way than that, in which the Anti-Calvinist obtains his hope of being in a state of salvation, namely, by the evidences which he possesses of his being himself in a renewed and justified condition. He knows from the word of God, that the saints are "chosen to salvation

salvation through sanctification of the Spirit" no less than "the belief of the truth;" that they are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of Christ;" and "created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that they should walk in them:" and hence he feels, that it is only so long as he experiences the sanctifying influences of the Spirit in his own heart, so long as he himself in some degree reflects the image of Christ, and walks, imperfectly indeed, but yet sincerely, in these good works, that he can have any scriptural grounds for concluding that he is one of God's elect, and will have his portion with the saints. This is true Calvinism. And where is the tendency of this doctrine to make its followers slothful, or confident, negligent of the means of grace, or inattentive to moral and relative duties? It would rather have a contrary effect. It would rather increase their circumspection, and quicken their exertions

in the attainment of holiness. It would rather excite them to "give the more diligence to make their calling and election sure."

But admitting that there may still be some apparent ground for the objection, which you have stated; admitting that the doctrines of Calvinism, if judged of by the lives of some of those who profess to receive them, may still seem to be productive of practical evils; yet is there not another side of the subject to be contemplated? Do not these doctrines possess in themselves some peculiar tendencies to promote holiness of heart and life? Are not the sublime and aweful views, which they unfold of the sovereignty and omniscience of the Almighty, of the immutability of His purposes, of the unfathomable depths of His wisdom, and at the same time of His distinguishing mercy, His unchangeable love, and His immutable truth — are not these views, I ask, adapted in an eminent degree to produce

produce on the mind of man the most salutary and desirable impressions? Do they not directly tend to excite adoration and awe, to kindle devotion, to deepen humility, to inculcate patience and submission, to inflame the soul with holy love and spiritual desires, and to cheer and support it in seasons of darkness, temptation, and distress? While the practical evils, which Calvinism is charged with producing, are so prominently and studiously exhibited to view by many of its opponents; let us not omit, on the other hand, to do justice to this calumniated system, nor forget the abundant good, which it is not only capable of accomplishing, but which it actually does accomplish. I have no doubt, but that some of the sublimest feelings of pure and spiritual delight, which are ever experienced on earth, are those, of which the Calvinist partakes, when in his secret retirement with his God, the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit, and shining

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on his own gracious operation on the heart, he meditates on the wonderful and unspeakable privileges, to which through Christ he sees himself entitled; and resolving all the blessings, which have been already received, or are prepared for him hereafter, into the eternal purpose and electing love of God his Father, and absorbed in a holy contemplation of the Divine counsels and perfections, he lies prostrate before the throne of grace in deep humiliation, and with overwhelming joy. I do not say, that others have not their peculiar feelings of spiritual delight; but these are *his*. And does he rise from such communion with his God without enlarged desires and resolutions of more seriously devoting himself to the Divine favour, of more decidedly overcoming the flesh and the world, and of more faithfully doing the will and advancing the glory of his Lord and Saviour? Facts and experience reply to this enquiry. Among no denomination or description

of professing Christians is there to be found a larger proportion of humble, pious, and devoted servants of God; persons of a truly Christian spirit, zealous in good works, and exemplary in every duty and relation of life, than among those who hold the Calvinistic tenets. I am sure that your observation and your candour will fully justify this statement. And therefore, so far as this system is to be judged of by its actual effects, I think that on a candid reconsideration of the subject, you will be induced to abandon your objection, and to admit that it was founded on an erroneous and partial view of the subject.

The fact is really this: the practical consequences, which appear to result from these doctrines, are not produced simply by the reception and profession of them, but by the state of heart with which they are received and professed. The seed, when it falls into good ground, will bring forth fruit. When the heart

is

is really under the influence of the Spirit of God, then the Calvinistic doctrines, being received into a prepared and congenial soil, will be productive of good. They will aid the growth of every Christian temper, and grace, and will tend to improve the tone and to exalt the standard of Christian practice. But where the soul is still a stranger to renewing grace, where the heart is still unoccupied by the Spirit of God; there the tenets, of which we are speaking, being speculatively embraced by the understanding, and received into a mind unhumbled and unholy, will necessarily be productive of evil. They will be abused and perverted, and made instruments and occasions of sin.

But let it be remembered, that this abuse and perversion of the truth is not confined to the doctrines of Calvinism. Every other doctrine of Scripture is equally liable to the same treatment, and in fact is treated precisely in the same

way. The heart of man, so long as it is unholy and unhumbled, perverts and abuses every scriptural truth. It presumes on the long-suffering of God; degrades the standard of his holy law, and turns his grace into licentiousness. Persons, whose hearts are not actuated by a principle of godliness, will not make a legitimate use of any of the Christian doctrines: they will hold them in unrighteousness, or wrest them to their own destruction.

I will conclude the present letter with reminding you how exactly this representation of the subject accords with the view which our church gives of it in respect to this very doctrine of election, as exhibited in her seventeenth article. She there tells us, that 'as the godly 'consideration of predestination and our 'election in Christ is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to *godly* '*persons, and such as feel in themselves* '*the workings of the Spirit of Christ,* 'mortifying

'mortifying the works of the flesh and
'their earthly members, and drawing
'up their minds to high and heavenly
'things, as well because it doth greatly
'establish and confirm their faith of
'eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through
'Christ, as because it doth fervently
'kindle their love towards God: so for
'*curious and carnal persons, lacking the*
'*Spirit of Christ*, to have continually
'before their eyes the sentence of God's
'predestination, is a most dangerous
'downfall, whereby the devil doth thrust
'them either into desperation, or into
'wretchlessness of most unclean living,
'no less perilous than desperation.'

I am, &c.

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LETTER VIII.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I HAVE perused your letter with sensations of peculiar pleasure. I rejoice to discover that my endeavours have not been altogether unsuccessful. I rejoice to find you acknowledging, with that candour and openness which I gave you credit for possessing, that though you are still an Anti-Calvinist, as to your own particular sentiments, yet you begin to look on the advocates for the Calvinistic tenets, and on the controversy which has taken place on the subject, with very different eyes from those with which you regarded these matters previously to the commencement of our correspondence. With respect to that controversy, the questions which you suggest are striking

and appropriate. If such be the state of the case, — if the doctrines of personal election and final perseverance be not in themselves truths essential to salvation, — if the belief of them be neither prescribed nor forbidden in Scripture, — if the profession of them, instead of being necessarily productive of moral and practical evil, has, in fact, a contrary tendency; — 'What occasion,' you ask, 'has there been for so many angry and 'protracted controversies on the subject? 'and from what cause have they arisen?' Of these questions the solution is not difficult. There has, doubtless, been little occasion for these controversies, and certainly none for the angry and contentious spirit in which they have been too often conducted. The points, indeed, in which Calvinists and Anti-Calvinists have in judgment differed from each other, have furnished legitimate subjects for rational and temperate discussion; for as no censure can attach to either

party, in consequence of entertaining opposite sentiments on points, in which the Scriptures have not, as a matter of faith, pronounced any definite conclusion; so there can be no impropriety in each of them stating, with meekness and moderation, the peculiar grounds for their respective opinions. But when these boundaries are passed; when the advocates on either side carry on the disputation with unchristian tempers and weapons; when, instead of standing merely on their own defence, and guarding their own positions, they angrily attack those of the party who differ from them; when, forgetting the many essential points in which they are both agreed, as well as the numerous obligations, by which they are mutually bound to bear with each other's infirmities, and to "keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace," they maintain this controversy with a pertinacious and hostile spirit; as if the points in dispute were matters of prime import-

importance, and as if a difference of opinion respecting them was a sufficient justification for the extinction or suspension of every kind and charitable feeling: surely, in such a case, while we should deeply deplore the injurious effects of such a warfare on the vital interests of Christianity, we must decidedly condemn the parties by whom it is conducted.

As to the *cause* from which these controversies have arisen, it is in itself sufficiently evident. They obviously result from the malicious influence of Satan, operating on the corruptions of our depraved nature. We have already seen how greatly he is concerned to promote these controversies, and to foment the feuds to which they give birth. And, unhappily, he finds too great a facility in accomplishing his object; too many means within his reach; too many instruments prepared for his purpose. For not to mention all the ungodly professors on both sides of the question, who, being

destitute of any real principle of faith and holiness, are led captive by him at his will, and are ready to take any part which he shall assign to them, there are not few, even among the real servants of Jesus Christ, who, suffering themselves, through the prevalence of remaining corruption, to be drawn into the vortex of controversy, inconsiderately lend their countenance to the support of this unholy conflict, and so forward the designs of their spiritual enemy. With respect to the former of these two descriptions of persons, there is but little hope of prevailing with them to lay aside their animosities, and to exercise forbearance one towards the other; for while they are destitute of Christian principles in the heart, they must be impenetrable to Christian motives, and regardless of Christian practice. But, would that the other part might be induced, so far as in them lies, to terminate the disgraceful contest, and, by mutual concessions, and

sometimes

sometimes by mutual silence, to heal these wounds in the body of Christ! *They* are accessible to Christian arguments, and capable of being influenced by Christian considerations; and to *them*, therefore, we may surely look for a corresponding improvement in temper and conduct. Would, then, on the one hand, that the pious Calvinist might be prevailed on no longer to bring forward his peculiar tenets in an offensive and unguarded form, but to assign to them that secondary place in the Christian system to which alone they can aspire, and to speak charitably and respectfully of those who differ from him! Would, on the other hand, that the pious Anti-Calvinist might be persuaded to cease from all harsh and criminating censure of such as, in respect to these peculiar tenets, may dissent from his opinion, — to leave off declaiming against these doctrines as unscriptural and mischievous, — to admit that other persons may possibly see what

he has not discovered, — to do justice to the piety, charity, zeal, and exemplary lives of the great mass of the Calvinistic professors, — and to ascribe such faults and failings as may occasionally appear among them, not to the operation of the peculiarities which they profess, but to the remaining infirmities and corruptions of our common nature, even in its most exalted and purified condition on earth! If such were the conduct which the *real* servants of the Lord would adopt and pursue, then, indeed, might we hope for increasing peace and glory to his church. Laying aside their minor differences, and leaving such discussions of non-essential points to those angry disputants, who know not God, *they* might strive together for the faith of the Gospel, and, uniting heart and hand in the great and glorious work which lies before them, they might reasonably hope for a double portion of His blessing on themselves and on their labours in His cause. May

the God of peace shed abroad in all our hearts a spirit of unity and concord, and grant that all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, may love one another with a pure heart fervently!

I said that I had perused your letter with peculiar pleasure; but I have not yet noticed the particular passage which has excited these pleasurable sensations. I will now, however, produce it, long as the extract may appear, for the purpose of founding on it a few observations. 'I am glad,' you say, 'to find from your 'statement, that you do not consider a 'belief of the Calvinistic doctrines to be 'essential to salvation; for I cannot my-'self perceive the scriptural grounds on 'which they are supposed to rest. But 'though I profess myself an Anti-Cal-'vinist, yet I am decidedly convinced that 'my salvation must be entirely of grace. 'If I am saved, I feel that it will be owing 'exclusively to the free, unmerited, and 'spontaneous mercy of God to me. For

'He

' He not only has revealed to us a way of
' salvation, and has placed me within the
' sphere and light of this revelation, but
' I am sensible that He must also at first
' incline, and afterwards enable me,
' through the gracious influences of his
' Spirit, to receive, obey, and love the
' things revealed. If I may now be se-
' riously disposed to " seek the truth
' as it is in Jesus," and anxiously desi-
' rous and sincerely resolved to discover
' and follow it, I know that this dispo-
' sition, this desire, and this resolution,
' are altogether the work and the gift of
' God. If, having once entered on the
' paths of righteousness, I shall now be
' enabled to persevere unto the end, I am
' convinced that it must be owing solely
' to the same grace, which first having
' given me a good will, and ever after
' continuing to work with me when I
' have it, can alone preserve and keep
' me unto everlasting life. So that from
' first to last, from the hour of my spi-
' ritual

'ritual birth to the very moment in which
'I shall be admitted into the realms of
'light, the whole work of my salvation
'must be resolved into the infinite mercy
'of Him, who found me when I sought
'him not, and has brought me nigh when
'I was afar off.'

This is the passage in your letter which has filled my heart with joy; for I fully believe it to contain the lively and genuine confession of a true Christian. With *less* than this confession Christianity cannot be satisfied, but *more* it cannot require. If ever the disciples of Christ are to meet together in this world on any common ground, it must be within the inclosure which this confession circumscribes. Here in this sacred spot must be planted that tree for the healing of the nations, beneath whose shade both Calvinists and Anti-Calvinists may alike repose, may bury their mutual prejudices, and feast together on the rich provisions of the Gospel. Surely the time will come when

when this happy and glorious vision shall be realized, when "Ephraim shall no more envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim;" when all the sincere servants of the Lord shall lay aside their differences, animosities, and contentions; and being "of one mind and one spirit," shall live to the praise and glory of that grace by which they have been "called out of darkness into marvellous light." Surely such a time *will* come; but whenever it may come, the basis, on which this union will be formed, must be the confession which you have made. Why, then, cannot all, who now build on this confession, unite also in the bonds of Christian love? Why cannot they, overlooking minor discrepancies, and suffering each other to exercise their respective judgement in non-essential matters, mutually hold out the right hand of fellowship, and walk together in harmony and peace?

Believe me that this is no Utopian and visionary

visionary scheme, no untried and speculative project. It is a plan for union, which has experience on its side, and to the efficacy of which many can furnish living testimony. Instances are not wanting of Christian friends associating together in habits of the most unreserved and confidential intercourse, yea, even of Christian ministers officiating in the same parish in perfect harmony, and to the great evident benefit of their flock, who yet, in respect to the Calvinistic points, maintain discordant and opposite opinions. This discordance, however, interrupts neither the usefulness of the one party, nor the friendship of the other: for, holding in common the confession which you have made, they find this union of sentiment with respect to the doctrines of grace sufficient for every practical and useful purpose. Here they can unite in serving and praising God, in loving one another, and in benefiting their fellow-creatures. Here they can unite in dis-

discharging all the duties and offices of Christian friends and Christian ministers. Here they can unite, neither obtruding on each other their own peculiar views of Calvinistic or Anti-Calvinistic doctrine, nor suffering their acknowledged diversity of sentiment on this subject to diminish their mutual affection, or to interfere with their mutual labours.

But the same unanimity which thus appears in these particular instances, might universally appear, wherever Christian principles and true grace are prevalent in the heart. Let us hope that it may more generally appear; that the real servants of Christ may better understand their duty and their calling, and being at peace one with another, and "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, may be multiplied."

I am, &c.

LETTER IX.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

You have requested my opinion on the subject of Regeneration, and on the Controversy connected with it: and I will readily comply with your request, so far as offering some few general remarks on these points may be deemed a compliance. As to the controversy itself, I have no desire or intention to enter into it: nor is there any occasion that I should; as it has been already amply discussed by the different parties engaged, to whose publications I refer you for particulars.

Not that I consider this controversy in the same light and on the same footing with that on the Calvinistic question. The point here in dispute is one of vital and

and essential moment, and which, with great propriety, may interest the feelings, and call forth the energies of all those who would "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

In the controversy before us, indeed, it has so happened, that the *ostensible* has not been the *real* object in dispute; and I think, that to this circumstance no small portion of the misunderstanding which has prevailed on the subject may be ultimately ascribed. The combatants have been so occupied in the assault and defence of one particular post, as to have induced a belief, that this alone has been the primary, if not the only point contested: whereas the value and importance of this station have been altogether relative, and have arisen merely from its connection with another position, which, though less obvious, has been the real object of contention.

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I have already represented Christianity as a system of religion, the design of which is to recover the human soul out of its fallen state, and to restore it to a capacity for finding happiness in the presence and service of a holy God. If this representation be correct, it must be obvious that such a recovery and restoration of the soul implies the accomplishment of a certain change in its spiritual faculties; since it is in the depravation of these that its incapacity for happiness naturally consists. And it must be further obvious, that as the measure and extent of this change depend on the precise *degree* of such incapacity, so our estimate of that measure and extent will be influenced by the apprehensions which we entertain of this degree. If, on the one hand, we think but lightly of the soul's spiritual depravation, we shall of course regard the change, which a restoration to its original condition implies, as slight and inconsiderable. But if, on the

the other hand, we look on the depraved state of the soul as amounting to a total extinction of its spiritual faculties, it is plain that, with these views, the change to be accomplished in its recovery will appear to be great and momentous.

I need not inform you, that it is this change in the state of the soul, which in the baptismal controversy is expressed by the term Regeneration. As to the author of the change, I believe that there is no avowed difference of opinion. All parties agree in ascribing it to the operation of the Spirit of God. But while some maintain that this operation is *necessarily* and *uniformly* annexed to the due administration of the sacrament of baptism, and that all persons who are rightly baptized are made at that time partakers of this change, either in whole or in part; others contend that there is no necessary connection between baptism and regeneration, as between cause and effect; but that this change is altogether inde-

independent of the sacrament of baptism; that it *may* indeed begin at the time of its administration; but that it may have commenced before, or may take place afterwards, or may never take place at all. This, I say, has been the *ostensible* point in dispute: but the *real* object of contention has been something very different.

These varying opinions of men, on the subject of this change, have a close, though perhaps, by themselves, an unperceived connection with their apprehensions of its measure and extent: and from what causes these apprehensions result, I have already suggested. They result from the particular estimate which is formed of the soul's natural incapacity for true religion: while it is manifest that this estimate itself will be regulated by a still further consideration, namely, by our perceptions of the nature of true religion, and of those services and duties, of those pleasures and consolations, which

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are peculiar to it. As these perceptions vary, the incapacity of the soul for such duties and pleasures, and consequently its natural alienation from them, in which its real depravation consists, will be measured and estimated. A different standard is employed to ascertain the degree of deficiency; and according as this standard is elevated or depressed, the deficiency will appear to be greater or less. If a man, for instance, supposes that the whole duty which Christianity enjoins on him is an open profession of belief in the truths of the Gospel, a regular observance of the outward forms and ordinances of religion, and a general attention to the practice of moral virtues; if he apprehends that all the pleasure to be found in Christianity consists in a mere self-complacency arising from the thoughts of his own religious pretensions, and in some indefinite hope of everlasting happiness; if such be his estimate of the duties and pleasures of religion, it is obvious

obvious that he will not look upon the soul's natural incapacity for them as very considerable: because he will find that these are duties and pleasures, in which, with some little improvement, and some slight elevation, it is naturally capable of participating: and though, in accordance with his creed, he may possess a belief that this improvement and elevation must be the work of the Spirit of God, yet he will *practically* look only to the operation of human means; to the influence of education, of moral suasion, and of worldly motives. His original perceptions of the nature of true religion affect his whole system, and reduce every part of it to their own defective and diminutive standard.

But let a man be supposed to have far different perceptions on this subject. Let his apprehensions of the nature of true religion be enlarged and exalted. Let him perceive that its duties and services, its pleasures and consolations, are of a far

higher and more refined character; that Christianity requires of its followers not only an open profession of belief in the truths of the Gospel, but an actual receiving and engrafting of them by faith into the heart; that it prescribes, not only a regular observance of the outward forms and ordinances of religion, but also an inward conformity of soul to their holy purposes and designs; that it not only enjoins a general attention to the practice of moral virtues, but also greatly expands the circle of moral duty, nor accepts of any obedience which does not result from religious motives, and is not directed to religious ends; that its service is altogether a spiritual service; that it requires purity of intention, truth in the inward parts, sanctified affections, and the devotion of the whole soul to the will and glory of God. Let him perceive, that the pleasures of religion are like its duties, of a spiritual nature; that the joys which it imparts are pure and elevated;

vated; that the happiness which it communicates consists in the exercise of faith and hope, in the love of God shed abroad in the heart, in fellowship with the Father, in communion with Christ, in the witness of the Spirit with our spirit that we are the children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. Let such be a man's perceptions of true religion, of the sublime and spiritual nature of its duties and pleasures, and what will be his estimate of the depraved and corrupted condition of the human soul? He will see that it is *indeed* 'far gone from original righte-'ousness,' "alienated *indeed* from the life of God." He will be sensible of its utter incapacity, not only to recover itself out of this fallen state, but even to desire its own recovery, or naturally to understand in what particulars it consists. And commensurate with these views of the state of the soul, will be his appre-

hensions of the change which it must undergo, no less than of the power by which alone this change can be wrought. He will see that the soul stands in need of a *total* renovation; that a new spiritual feeling, perception, taste, must be given to it; that a supernatural principle must be implanted in it, which nothing but a Divine energy can at first communicate, and nothing but a Divine power can afterwards preserve. As in the former instance, so in this, the original perceptions which he entertains of the nature of true religion, impart their influence and character to all his system. The spirituality with which he sees her to be invested, furnishes a standard which he applies to every part, and in conformity to which he adjusts, exalts, and purifies the whole.

And thus we are arrived at the point to which I purposed to conduct you. The real, but concealed, object of this contro-

controversy has been the nature of true religion. Its *spirituality* has been the actual matter in dispute. The doctrine of baptismal regeneration has been viewed with jealousy and resisted with vehemence, because, in the opinion of those who have thus opposed it, the practical tendency of the doctrine is obviously not only to lower and degrade the spiritual standard of Christianity, but in fact to alter, and even to destroy, its peculiar nature, character, and objects. For if (as the advocates for this doctrine contend) that renovating change, in which the soul's recovery from its natural depravation consists, uniformly takes place at baptism; then it follows, that every baptized person is naturally capacitated for participating the duties and pleasures of true religion. But great numbers of those who have been baptized, evidently show that, notwithstanding their supposed change, they are still as 'far gone from

'original righteousness,' and as much "alienated from the life of God," as those who have not been baptized. To maintain, then, this doctrine, to insist that this change — a change which still leaves the subjects of it in such an evident state of incapacity for true religion, — is the whole of that spiritual renovation which the soul requires, is, in the opinion of the opposite party, to inculcate very low and defective notions of what religion really is; and, in fact, virtually to divest it of every thing pure, elevated, and spiritual.

This is the reason why the doctrine of a baptismal regeneration has been so strongly opposed. It has aimed a blow, as its opponents have viewed the subject, at the very vitals of Christianity. The parties who have advanced and supported this doctrine, may not themselves have been aware of its dangerous tendency. But the others have seen, or thought that they

they have seen it, and with becoming vigilance and promptitude have come forward to meet the attack and defend the citadel.

Such appears to me to be a correct statement of the case: and there is an easy method of proving whether it be so or not. Let the advocates for baptismal regeneration either openly renounce their assumption that the change signified by regeneration is *necessarily* and *uniformly* connected with baptism, or let them distinctly avow that by the change so connected they mean a change of *some other kind*, and not *that* which restores to the soul its spiritual fitness for seeing and serving God: and in either of these cases, if I am correct in my views of this controversy, the opposing party will withdraw from the combat, and will leave their antagonists in quiet possession of their opinions. For whatsoever those opinions may then be, they will no longer be set in opposition to that object, which by

those who discern it, is esteemed the most valuable attribute of true religion, and the part which, of all others, they are most bound to preserve inviolate — its *spirituality*.

I am, &c.

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LETTER X.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

I PERCEIVE that I have again incurred the charge of uncharitableness. You accuse me with having 'passed a sentence 'of condemnation in my last letter on all 'who espouse the doctrine of baptismal 'regeneration, and with having repre-'sented them as persons destitute of all 'spiritual religion.'

To this charge, however, I must plead, as I did on the former occasion, that I am not guilty. I must remind you, as I did then, that I was speaking not of persons, but of principles. I said, indeed, that the practical tendency of this doctrine, in the opinion of those who dissent from it, is obviously to change the nature of Christianity, to destroy its vitality,

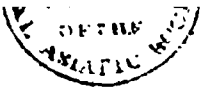
and entirely to take away its spiritual character. But I did not say, nor even intimate, that all who maintain and inculcate the notions of baptismal regeneration, either design that it should produce these effects, or are aware of its tendency to produce them; much less that they are themselves utterly destitute of spiritual religion. On the contrary, I cannot but hope and believe that many of them, notwithstanding their attachment to a doctrine, so injurious in its influence upon vital Christianity, yet in themselves have really spiritual views of religion, and regard the services and pleasures to which she calls them, as of a spiritual nature and character. Their standard, indeed, of the spirituality of religion, is far less exalted than that which I described in my last letter; and, consequently, their apprehensions of the soul's spiritual depravation are less deep and extensive. But still, widely as they may appear in these respects to differ from

from such as maintain the higher standard, they are in reality far more remote in sentiment from those who reduce Christianity to a mere composition of forms, ceremonies, and ordinances, totally destitute of life and vitality.

And this is one peculiar feature in the present controversy. Many of the persons, now engaged in opposition to each other, really approximate much nearer in their opinion than several of those, who are ranged on the same side. For even they who admit the lowest degree of spirituality in religion, must have far more community of feeling and interest with those who contend for the highest, than they possibly can have with such as virtually exclude *all* spirituality.

It is greatly to be desired that this point were more duly considered by that part of the advocates for baptismal regeneration, who are yet convinced of the necessity for some essential change in the spiritual faculties of the soul. It is

greatly to be desired that they would seriously reflect on the unnatural alliance which, in this instance, they have formed with persons, who the more readily adopt this interpretation of the doctrine in question, because it favours their erroneous sentiments, and countenances them in their attempt to reduce Christianity to a mere system of lifeless forms and external morality. That such persons should prefer the notions of baptismal regeneration; that they should maintain that the only necessary change to be wrought in the natural state and condition of the soul is that, which the due administration of this sacrament indiscriminately confers on all who partake of it, is not surprising: because this doctrine not only induces a persuasion of their own individual safety, of their claim to the character of Christians, and of their interest in the promises and privileges of the Gospel; but even allows them, in conjunction with this hope, to retain and indulge a carnal



mind and a worldly spirit, unmortified lusts and unsubdued tempers; and even in the midst of formal services, destitute of all spiritual life and devotional feeling, to boast of their relation to God, and of their title to heaven. But that other persons, who differ widely and essentially from these in their views of Christianity; who have juster and more accurate conceptions of religion; who believe that God requires some portion at least of spiritual obedience, that He demands, to a degree, the service of the heart, and will reject with abhorrence that sacrifice of ceremonial observances, which is unaccompanied by some inward devotion; that persons, with such conceptions of the nature of true religion, should embrace the notion of baptismal regeneration, does indeed excite my surprise: because I should think that they must perceive in the very lives of numbers who hold this doctrine with them, a practical refutation of it; because they must see, whatever

whatever may be the case with themselves, that there are thousands of baptized persons around them, who give no evidence of having experienced any spiritual change, and who obviously remain as widely alienated from the life of God, as the very heathen, who have never even heard the name of Christ.

I am aware that those who are anxious to uphold their system and to maintain its consistency, will say, that even these persons were originally regenerated at baptism; that through the efficacy of that ordinance they did actually receive at the time a portion of grace; that there was really implanted in them a divine seed, though from want of subsequent cultivation and improvement, or from the resistance and opposition which it has encountered, it has hitherto lain dormant in the soul, and has been productive of no positive and visible effects. But in answer to this statement, I would ask, from what cause has it arisen that this divine

divine seed has experienced in these persons so much inattention and neglect, so much opposition and resistance? Has it not been from the prevailing indisposition of their heart to spiritual things; from the soul's predilection to the works of the flesh, and to the pomps and vanities of the world; in other words, from the depravation of its spiritual faculties, from its natural incapacity for participating the duties and pleasures of true religion? If I mistake not, the advocates for baptismal regeneration (such of them I mean as are convinced of the necessity for some real spiritual change) will readily admit that these are the causes, which prevent the seed, originally sown in baptism, from vegetating and coming to perfection. But mark the inference which flows from this admission. If these causes still exist and operate in the soul, so as to counteract the work of grace, which, according to their hypothesis, has commenced within; then it is plain, that

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in these persons the soul has not been really and radically changed; the depravation of its spiritual faculties still continues; and consequently the operation wrought in baptism was not that spiritual renovation, which the opposers of baptismal regeneration have in view, when they talk of 'the new birth.' That operation, whatever it may be, must evidently be *something* very distinct from this spiritual change; *something*, which its advocates will surely not deem an object worthy of serious contention, when they consider; that at the best, even on their own admission, it leaves the soul still under its prevailing indisposition to spiritual things, still under its natural incapacity for true religion. If, indeed, while they make this admission, they are still of opinion, that some effect, though its precise nature and extent cannot be determined, is annexed to the due administration of baptism; and that, in conformity to the language of Scripture and

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of our Church, they ought to denominate this effect, regeneration; in this case, as I have already stated, the controversy with *them* seems to be at an end: nor will their opponents, I apprehend, deem it necessary to protract the dispute on an opinion, which does not endanger the vital interests of Christianity. They will suffer their antagonists to hold unmolested their own idea and explanation of the *term* regeneration, provided that they appear no longer to apply it to that great spiritual change in the soul, which both parties agree in considering as essential to its recovery from the ruins of the fall.

The only real ground of difference between these parties is the *degree* of spirituality, to which the standard of true religion should be referred: and surely this is a point, which, if it afford matter of discussion, need not and ought not to excite any hostile feelings on either side. Why should those who conceive

conceive that a limited measure of spirituality is all which Christianity requires, regard with sentiments of jealousy and dislike those, whose conceptions of Christian piety are more expanded than their own. Though they may be inclined to disapprove the extent to which these conceptions are carried, yet the excess, if excess there be, is on that side where it may well be tolerated: for it is far less dangerous to exalt the standard of spiritual religion too high (should such an exaltation be possible), than to depress and sink it too low. The error, if it be one, is surely venial; and may justly claim indulgence and forbearance. On the other hand, why should those, who have more elevated notions of the nature of Christianity and of the spirituality of its duties and pleasures, regard with superciliousness or animosity their brethren, whose apprehensions on these subjects they may now consider as in some degree clouded and immature. Their own religious

religious system should remind them, that as water cannot rise to a higher level than that of the source from which it springs, so likewise our views of spiritual religion will be lowered or exalted according to the measure of grace and knowledge vouchsafed to us from above. Instead, then, of hastily condemning such as may not see so distinctly, nor think so spiritually as themselves, let them learn to exercise candour and charity towards them; let them bear with their infirmities, and patiently wait till a more copious effusion of the Spirit may be granted unto them.

Thus let both these parties, mutually laying aside their contentions and jealousies, draw near to each other in Christian fellowship and love. "Keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," let them combine their force against the common enemies of both, against those who would spoil Christianity of its highest glory and excellence, the internal beauty

beauty of holiness. Against adversaries like these, let their united zeal and activity be exerted: nor let them suffer any lesser differences among themselves, by disturbing their unanimity, to weaken their efforts in the common cause, or to excite a suspicion of their countenancing an interpretation of Christian truth so erroneous and destructive as that which many of the advocates of baptismal regeneration are evidently attempting to establish.

I am, &c.

LETTER XI.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

ANTINOMIANISM is another of those evils, of which, in these times, you reasonably complain. On this subject, though I have already made a cursory allusion to it in a former letter, I will now offer some particular remarks.

Any system of religious doctrine which tends, in its practical consequences, to lower the standard or to narrow the extent of moral obedience, is a species of Antinomianism. But the system which we particularly understand by this denomination, consists in such a partial, perverse, or unguarded statement of the doctrines of grace, as tends to establish the conclusion, that Christian privileges may be separated from moral duties; or, in other

other words, that the practice, and temper, and spirit, which the preceptive parts of Scripture enjoin, are not indispensably requisite, either as an *evidence* of our faith, or as a *qualification* for our admission to the privileges and enjoyments of piety. It is a system, which, professing to release the believer in Christ from the necessity of personal holiness, and an individual conformity to the image and will of his Creator, virtually "makes void the law;" and, under the pretence of promoting religious liberty, opens the flood-gates to every species of vice and immorality.

Such is the system which we denominate Antinomianism; and which I have already represented as one of those instruments by which Satan endeavours to establish his own interests, and to subvert the church and kingdom of Christ. And certainly no instrument can appear more directly suited to the purpose. Let us not, however, suppose that it is an instrument first invented and used in modern times.

times. There has been no period of Christianity, in which this weapon has not been employed to the same purposes for which it is now used. We find as early as in the apostolic age, that this mystery of iniquity began to work. When St. Paul so cautiously guards, and so strongly protests against those perversions to which the doctrines of grace are liable, he plainly intimates his conviction, that there existed even at that time persons disposed so to pervert them. And both St. Peter and St. Jude predict very fully the existence and prevalence of Antinomian teachers and doctrines, in the subsequent periods of the Christian church. Let us not, then, be surprised if such teachers and doctrines are seen in our own days. They are some of the tares, which Satan too successfully sows among the wheat. They are corruptions, which attend the truth as uniformly as the shadow follows the substance. So long as the nature of man continues depraved

praved and evil, and Satan is permitted to harass and infest the Church of Christ, so long must we expect to see, in a greater or a less degree, the effects of his malicious influence in the production of Antinomian principles and practices.

But though these things may not excite our surprise, they cannot but call forth our sorrow and concern. All who "love the Lord Jesus in sincerity," who supremely desire the increase and prosperity, the purity and glory of his church, cannot but deeply deplore the operation of an instrument so peculiarly adapted to injure and defile it. Antinomianism may, in fact, be considered as the master-piece of Satanic power and art. Of all the engines which the great enemy of God and man has ever employed for accomplishing his diabolical designs, this is the most finished and complete. Of all the infusions by which he has attempted to poison the fountain of truth, this is by far the most subtle, the most deadly. In fact,

fact, it is the subtlety of the poison which constitutes its most dangerous property. Secretly it insinuates its baneful influence; imperceptibly it pervades the moral system: and its effects are mortal in proportion as they are unsuspected.

Permit me, then, with the view of guarding you against the insidious attacks of this destructive system, to point out to you some few instances, in which its subtlety more especially betrays itself.

One instance of this subtlety is to be seen in the object which Antinomianism professes to have almost exclusively in view, namely, the exaltation of Christ, and the increase of his glory. I need not inform you that the grand peculiarity of this system consists in exhibiting the righteousness of Christ as imputed to his people, not only for pardon and acceptance with God, but for sanctification also. He is represented as being "the end of the law" to all true believers on him, not only for their justifying righteousness,

but also for their personal holiness. They are described as holy and sanctified in Him, no less than pardoned and justified: while this more extended view, as it is asserted, of his all-sufficiency and perfection for the salvation of his people, exalts his glory and supplies to them additional sources of joyful praise and grateful adoration. But mark the practical consequences, which result from this perverse and unscriptural representation of Christian truth; consequences so direct and obvious, that, although they may not be studiously pointed out by the teacher of these doctrines, yet cannot fail of spontaneously suggesting themselves to every one of his hearers. If the people of Christ are sanctified in him, where is the necessity of their being sanctified in themselves? If they have in him a personal holiness, where is their obligation to have a personal holiness of their own? No obligation, no necessity of this kind exists. Let them be proud or sensual, worldly

worldly or malignant, still they are holy in Christ. No prevailing misconduct on their part, no want of habitual conformity to the Divine image and law, can disannul their interest, and therefore ought not to weaken their confidence in Christ. However frequent, however flagrant may be their violations of his commands, still they have a holiness in him; and to question and distrust it would be to renounce their privileges as children of God. Thus, under the pretence of exalting Christ, this system makes him indeed the minister of sin. Under the plausible profession of magnifying his grace and glory, it virtually encourages the practice of all those works of darkness which he was especially manifested to destroy. It cries, "Hail, Master! and kisses him:" while it treacherously betrays him to his enemies. It bows the head, and worships him; while at the same time it mocks him and sets him at nought.

Another instance of the subtlety of this system displays itself in the insidious manner in which it is propounded, and in the plausible and delusive form which it assumes. It does not pretend to introduce or establish new doctrines. It only professes to carry those, which the other advocates for evangelical truth adopt and venerate, to their legitimate extent and obvious conclusions. Here, however, in this very process, the mischief is effected. Under the pretext of honouring these doctrines, Antinomianism corrupts and perverts them. The sufficiency of the Redeemer, the completeness of his salvation, his imputed righteousness to his people, the love which he feels for them, the care which he takes of them, the privileges which he confers on them, are those delightful truths which constitute the glory and beauty of the Gospel, and are the only foundation of genuine devotion and piety. And these are the very truths on which Antinomianism

mianism professes to raise her superstructure. She pretends to esteem and adopt them as the life and soul of her system; but in her *mode* of adopting them she artfully contrives to destroy their vitality, and whatever semblance of beauty may be externally preserved, to substitute a putrid and offensive mass within. The same truths, indeed, are nominally professed; the same doctrines are still maintained, and to the eye may appear to reflect even a brighter lustre: but, infected by the contaminating touch of this baneful system, they have lost all their glory and excellency. They no longer possess their quickening, humbling, purifying influence. They may henceforth buoy up the affections, and may communicate a presumptuous confidence to the feelings; but they no longer generate holiness, watchfulness against sin, and tenderness of conscience; they no longer inspire humility, meekness, and charity. They promise, indeed, liberty;

but it is a liberty which proves to be only licentiousness: a liberty, which, retaining the name, yet utterly loses its nature; which, virtually alluring its followers into the most abject servitude to sin and lust, leaves them two-fold more the children of hell than they were before.

Another proof of the subtlety with which this system is conducted by its secret author and instigator, is the character of the agents, whom he employs for introducing it. We might, perhaps, have expected, that his ministers on this occasion would have exemplified in their own conduct and character the full practical tendency of the doctrines, which they disseminate. We might, perhaps, have expected, that they would have been generally distinguished by unchristian tempers and practices, by immorality of life, and a bold licentiousness of conduct. But however well-founded such expectations might at first sight appear, a little further reflection

would

would convince us of their unsoundness and fallacy. Agents of this description would not have suited the object and purposes of the deceiver. Such an open developement of his designs; such a direct exhibition of the mischievous and destructive nature of the system which he hoped to establish, would at once have defeated his intentions, and have rendered the attempt abortive. Neither the religious nor the irreligious part of the community would have fallen into such a snare. A more covert and insidious course must be pursued. Those, who should be employed in propagating Antinomianism, must display in their own lives nothing of its offensive and licentious tendency. On the *contrary*, they must, externally at least, be correct specimens and exemplars of the Christian character. The poison, which they are employed to diffuse, must be gilded over by the plausible exterior of their own religious profession. By their apparently

ardent zeal, upright conduct, and general purity of morals, the suspicions of mankind must be lulled asleep, and the pernicious consequences to which their tenets ultimately lead, must, for a season, be kept out of sight. It is only by selecting instruments of this description that Satan could reasonably entertain any probable expectation of success; and in selecting such instruments he discloses at once his consummate policy and malignant hopes. May his policy be defeated!—May his hopes perish!—May all those who have suffered themselves to be taken in this snare, have grace to recover themselves from it, and, before they irrecoverably fall, be snatched as brands out of the burning! If, notwithstanding present appearances, and this temporary departure from the truth, they are really the deceived and deluded servants of the Lord, may He speedily revisit them in mercy, dispel the clouds in which they are enveloped, and restore them to the paths of peace and holiness,

from

from which they have so unhappily wandered! Greatly, indeed, would all the people of God rejoice to see them renounce their errors, and return to that "faith which was once delivered to the saints." But till this event takes place, whatever charitable feelings of hope or pity may be entertained towards their persons, it is impossible but that, in their official capacity, they must be regarded as ministers of Satan, "transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." If I considered them in any other light, I feel that I must give up my whole views of the nature and design of the Gospel; and if I omitted, within the sphere of my influence, to exhibit them in this character, I should think that I was manifestly relinquishing my principles, and failing in a very important part of my duty.*

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* I cannot omit this opportunity of humbly but affectionately addressing those of my brethren in

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If I express myself strongly on this subject, it is because I deeply deplore and deprecate the great and portentous evils, with which this attempt to revive the Antinomian heresy threatens to afflict the church of Christ. Hitherto I have confined my observations to that part of the system from which its mischievous

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the ministry, who have lately advanced a position, as novel in expression as it is alarming in sound, namely, that the moral law is not to be regarded as a rule of life for believers. I am very far from intending to confound the persons to whom I allude with the teachers of Antinomian tenets; for I believe that the general tenor of their preaching and ministry is of a totally opposite description and tendency. But I would respectfully submit it to their consideration, whether by the promulgation of a statement which is so capable of being misunderstood, and requires to be explained and guarded by distinctions and niceties so unlike to the simple and unsophisticated declarations of Scripture, they are not, indirectly at least, countenancing the Antinomian heresy, and inadvertently paving the way for its more ready introduction, at some future time, among their own congregations?

chievous and destructive potency is principally derived, namely, the subtlety with which it is conducted.

In a subsequent letter I purpose to extend my remarks to the consequences which may be expected to follow; and shall endeavour to point out to you those practical evils, which true Christianity may justly apprehend from the increase and prevalence of Antinomian doctrine.

I am, &c.

LETTER XII.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

As a knowledge of the dangers which threaten us, must, in all cases, be the foundation of those means which we adopt for our security, it seems peculiarly desirable that the evils which are likely to accrue to the Christian church, from the present attempt to revive the Antinomian heresy, should be distinctly stated and perceived. The more clearly these are seen and understood, the less probability there is, that they who are exposed to its assaults, will be surprised and overcome by them. I will, therefore, specify three of these evils, which, in their operation and extent, appear to me the most dangerous and destructive.

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The dissemination of Antinomian tenets powerfully tends to excite and increase those injurious prejudices, which all men naturally entertain against the doctrines of grace: although, in truth, these doctrines have no legitimate connection with Antinomian principles or practices. The doctrines of grace, acting according to their obvious tendency, and left to their own natural operation, necessarily produce holiness of heart and life. They are highly moral and practical in their effects. The motives which they furnish, the obligations which they impose, the dispositions which they inspire, all unite in enforcing and securing conformity to the holy law of God. But Antinomianism, assuming these doctrines as the basis of its execrable system, and founding on them its own pernicious conclusions, exhibits the most distorted view of the sublime truths of the Gospel; and, by associating them with itself, countenances the supposition that they

they are necessarily connected with it. Hence a favourable occasion is furnished to persons who are so disposed, of strengthening the prejudices of themselves and others against evangelical truth. Those immoral and licentious practices, which it is the avowed and real object of the Gospel, in its genuine tendencies, to oppose and suppress, are represented as its natural and legitimate fruits. Consequences which it rejects and abhors, are unjustly ascribed to it. All the serious professors of godliness are involved in the general censure. They are indiscriminately accused of either intentionally or ignorantly upholding a system, pregnant with results the most destructive and mischievous. Many are offended; many are discouraged; many are hardened. Some, who were beginning to set out well in a Christian course, are afraid to proceed. Others turn back, and walk no more with Christ. Who can conjecture the number and extent

tent of the evils thus produced! How many humble and serious enquirers after truth are, like yourself, appalled and confounded at the portentous and forbidding aspect which Christianity is thus compelled to assume! How many bitter enemies of Christ behold it with malignant delight, and embrace with avidity the opportunity thus afforded them of calumniating and traducing the Gospel! How many of the righteous are made sad, and mourn in secret over these perversions of the truth! "Woe unto the world because of offences: for it must needs be that offences come: but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

Another way in which Antinomianism proves hurtful to the Church of Christ, is by bewildering in its delusive mazes some even of his true and faithful followers. Many of the Lord's people, though strong in faith, are weak in judgement. Their feelings are warm, their affec-

affections lively, and their zeal ardent: but at the same time soberness of mind, an habitual consideration of consequences, and the faculty of discerning things that differ, constitute no part of their character. Simple in heart, they suspect no evil where none obviously presents itself; and ungifted with that prudence which marks the connection between causes and effects, they fail to anticipate dangers, which are beyond the sphere of their immediate view. To persons of this description, the snare which Antinomianism spreads, is peculiarly dangerous. Its exalted pretensions to superior piety, the higher and brighter glory with which it professes to invest the Saviour, the entire and universal dependence on him which it inculcates, and the unfailing confidence and unclouded joy which it engages to impart, are attractions too inviting and powerful to be always resisted by minds such as I have described. And what, then, is the consequence? Seduced by these

these promising appearances, and exercising no discrimination, they are too easily persuaded to embrace a system, which presents itself under the specious title of Christianity, in its purest and most elevated form. They are won by its flattering offers, and range themselves among its followers and advocates.

And now observe the injuries which hence result to the church of Christ. A needless separation is produced. A new schism is effected among the real members of Christ's body. An alliance, strange and unnatural, is formed between two parties, in whom there is no one single point of real congeniality; between the children of darkness and the children of light; between those who dishonour and degrade the Redeemer, and those who seek to honour and exalt him; between those who allow and tolerate, and encourage sin, and those who cordially renounce and hate it. For such is still the case with even these deluded

deluded people of the Lord. They have in their heart a seed of holiness, which, in spite of the defiling tenets which they have embraced, still preserves them from utter contamination. By the energy of the divine principle still remaining in them, they are mercifully kept from the practical abominations, to which their new system of doctrine naturally leads. But though saved as it were by fire, they yet suffer much loss. They have not united themselves to these dangerous associates without having contracted some of the evils, to which such an union must necessarily expose them. They have lost that simplicity of character which they once had, and which, so long as they retained it, was one of their brightest ornaments. They are no longer those humble, plain, unassuming, and retired Christians which they once were. They are become forward, bold, and confident. Puffed up with self-conceit, and raised in their own opinion to a supe-

superior point of spiritual elevation, they contemptuously look down on those faithful servants of the Lord, whom they once respected and admired, and with whom they formerly walked in Christian friendship and communion. Of these they now speak in terms of disapprobation and disrespect; as if all light, and wisdom, and knowledge, and experience, were confined to themselves, and to be found in their views alone. Thus they disfigure the face of the Christian church; subject both it and themselves to much reproach; and lay up in store for themselves hereafter a bitter portion of self-condemnation and remorse, whenever the Lord, in mercy, shall bring them to soundness of mind, and, by humiliation and repentance, shall recover them from the error of their way.

Another injury, which the Church of Christ is likely to sustain from the same quarter, is indirect indeed in its operation, but not less pernicious in its results.

results. It arises from the effect which the dissemination of Antinomian principles is calculated to produce on the conduct and opinions of many, who earnestly endeavour to oppose them. Aware of the dangerous tendency of this corrupt system, they are anxious to counteract it; but in their zeal to attain this end, through inexperience or timidity, from deficiency of knowledge or from want of due attention to the circumstances of the case, they may probably have recourse to means, which in their consequences will prove little less hurtful to the real interests of Christianity, than the very evils which they are designed to pervert. It is a part of human infirmity, that we are prone to run into extremes; and with the view of avoiding one evil, we are often in danger of falling into another. Thus it is in the case before us. From the fear of countenancing, or of being suspected to countenance, the abominable conclusions, which Antinomianism

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mianism involves, the opposer of this system is strongly tempted to depart from that full exposition of the doctrines of grace, which he has been previously accustomed to maintain. Instead of continuing to exhibit these doctrines in their complete scriptural meaning, and of showing their uniform and necessary tendency, when thus exhibited, to enforce holiness of heart and life, he is in danger of being induced by degrees to state them less plainly and explicitly; to qualify his former explanations of them; to fence them with guards, and to fetter them with conditions, which are not warranted by the word of God; and thus to pare them down and to fritter them away, till at length they are stripped of all that is vital, essential, and spiritual, and are reduced to little more than a dead letter and a lifeless form of words. In order to show that the scheme of doctrine, which *he* espouses, is not one which supersedes the necessity of good-works, he may

may be led to speak of good works in such language as to appear, not indeed to lay an undue stress on the necessity of moral obedience, for that he cannot do, but to assign to it a place and an office, which in the Christian system it is neither designed nor qualified to fill: or to avoid the charge of preaching imputed sanctification, he may almost desist from asserting the necessity of justification by faith only, as if he were become ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, or had forgotten that it is still "the power of God unto salvation."

Incalculably great must be the evils, which such a deterioration of evangelical truth will obviously produce! And wherever such a deterioration is produced; wherever the waters, which antecedently have flowed clear and salutary, thus become turbid and noxious; wherever the preachers of the Word of God thus suffer themselves to be driven from that purity of doctrine, and to be spoiled of that unction

unction from the Spirit, which formerly characterised their ministry; then the triumphs of Antimonianism are complete; then it produces its full measure of mischief, and gratifies to the utmost the malicious designs of its diabolical author. How devoutly is it to be wished that all the ministers of the Word of God were duly aware of the peculiar temptation, to which they are exposed from this insidious attack; and by taking special heed to themselves and to their doctrine, would show that they are not ignorant of these devices of Satan! So far as the voice of an humble individual may be capable of reaching, I would endeavour to sound forth the note of alarm, and to awaken my brethren in the ministry to a full sense of their danger and duty in these times of peril and difficulty.

Such are the remarks which have occurred to me on the subject of the Antinomian heresy: of which I must repeat my former assertion, that I cannot but consider

consider it as one of the most subtle and destructive engines, which the adversary of God and man has ever invented for opposing and injuring the church of Christ. If, however, we confine our views of the subject to this single consideration, we shall at last attain but very inadequate conceptions respecting it. To understand it aright, we must not overlook the other representation, which I originally gave of this, as of every engine by which the church of Christ is assailed. We must not omit to consider even the Antinomian heresy itself as one of those instruments, which He, who sitteth in the heavens and hath all his enemies in derision, secretly overrules and employs for exercising the faith, for proving the graces, and for purifying the hearts of his true people. For this end alone He really permits it to exist: and to His glory He will ultimately compel it to contribute. He might at once separate these tares from the wheat, and purge his

his church from these noxious intruders. But He suffers them both to grow together unto the harvest; and for this reason, we may presume, among others, that the real qualities of each, and the essential distinction between them, may be indisputably proved; that the difference between His work and that of Satan may be clearly seen by their respective fruits; that the beauty and holiness of evangelical truth may be more illustriously displayed, when contrasted with the deformity and impurity of Antinomian corruption.

This view of the subject should not indeed diminish our desires or weaken our endeavours to counteract the operations of this anti-Christian system: but it should tend to mitigate our grief for the evils, which we cannot prevent; and to assist us in overcoming the difficulties, which they obviously lay in our way. Deeply as we may deplore the injurious effects of Antinomianism on the *visible*

church of Christ, let us remember that it cannot undermine or ultimately subvert His true and *invisible* church. No weapon formed against *this* shall prosper. The gates of hell shall never prevail against it. And every effort to impair its beauty or to arrest its progress, shall terminate only in the ruin and confusion of those who make the attempt.

I am; &c.

LETTER XIII.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In the conclusion of my last letter I reminded you of the distinction between the visible and the invisible church of Christ; a distinction to which I have already more than once incidentally alluded. But it has occurred to me, that a more direct and particular explication of this subject may serve still further to illustrate some of my former statements, as well as to throw light on another point referred to in one of your letters.

By the *visible* church of Christ, then, I understand the whole body of professing Christians throughout the world; as our own church expresses it, 'All who profess and call themselves Christians.' The members of this great body are, in-

deed, infinitely diversified among themselves. They are distinguished from each other by an almost endless variety in their forms of government, in their modes of worship and discipline, in their respective peculiarities of doctrine, in their different degrees of purity and corruption as to faith and practice. But notwithstanding these differences, they constitute one great whole, and are united together by the common tie of a professed belief in Christ, which forms their grand discriminating mark, and distinctly separates them from the rest of the world, whether Pagans, Mahometans, or Jews. They all belong to one family, which, amidst much diversity of feature and aspect, still retains a general and characteristic resemblance.

It is this *visible* church which is represented by so many comparisons in the discourses and parables of our Saviour. The "fishes" which are inclosed in the Gospel-net; the "guests" who come to the

the marriage-feast; the "virgins" who wait for the return of the bridegroom; the "servants who were intrusted with the talents, are all intended to describe the great body of professing Christians: those, who acknowledge Christ as their Lord; who avow themselves his followers, name themselves after his name, and profess to derive their religion from his word.

But amidst this general outward accordance of profession, there exists a real inward dissimilarity of character. Some among this mixed multitude are Christians, not only outwardly, but inwardly; not only in form and in name, but in truth and reality. And in all the comparisons adduced above as descriptive of the visible church, this distinction of character among the professing members of it is clearly and expressly designated. The "fishes" are said to be of every kind, both bad and good. The "guests" had not all alike the wedding-garment. Of the "virgins"

some were foolish and some were wise. Among the "servants" one was commended as having been good and faithful, and another condemned for his sloth and wickedness.

But perhaps you ask in what particulars this difference between the nominal and the real servants of Christ especially consists? Does it consist in the *degree* of profession which they make? Do all those who appear to be more earnest in the work of religion, necessarily belong to the *invisible* church? No. I have observed to you, in a former letter, that even among that part of the community which make a more zealous profession of Christianity, there are many unsound and hypocritical followers of Christ; and that to distinguish and separate these from his true people, is one part of the object, for which he permits his church, while on earth, to be harassed by Satan and his emissaries, to be assailed by persecutions, corruptions, and heresies. The actual

actual difference between the nominal and the real servants of Christ consists in this single particular: the latter are inwardly enlightened and habitually influenced by the Spirit of God, and the former are not. The latter have in them a principle of vitality derived and communicated from above, of which the former are destitute. They may both, possibly, agree in the same general truths; but those who are taught of God, maintain and apply these truths in a manner peculiar to themselves. They have not only the form of sound words, but their soul is cast into the mould of the Gospel, and has received the seal and impression of the Spirit. They worship God, not only with the outer man, but "in spirit and in truth." They present their bodies to him a living sacrifice. While they profess to be placed on the one foundation-stone which God has laid in Zion, they also themselves, "as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house."

These, then, alone constitute the *invisible* church of Christ. The tie which unites them to the Saviour is unperceived by the world. They are frequently unacknowledged even by other professors of Christianity; but they are infallibly distinguished by Christ, and recognised by him as his peculiar people. These are his secret, his hidden ones; his sheep, who know him, and are known of him. These are his true servants, in whom he dwells, and to whom he manifests himself. Led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God. Their life is hid with Christ in God; and because he lives they live also.

You will call to mind the different representations which I have already given of these persons. For they are, in fact, the persons who, whether Calvinists or Anti-Calvinists, with the heart believe on the Lord Jesus Chrit for salvation; who, whatever may be their peculiar sentiments on points of doubtful disputation, yet cordially

dially and practically unite in declaring with you, that "by grace they are saved through faith." These are the persons who, whatever they may think on the subject of baptismal regeneration, have spiritual views of religion, have themselves participated in a spiritual change, and are spiritually minded. These are the persons who, perhaps, having fallen through weakness of judgement, or the strength of remaining corruption, into some erroneous system of doctrine, are yet mercifully preserved by the vital principle operating within, from the practical evils, in which such a system would otherwise involve them. These, in short, are the persons, against whom the subtlety and malice of the spiritual adversary are chiefly exercised. To distract and confound them, to impede their growth, and to defile their purity, to defeat their purposes, and to prevent their numbers from increasing; these are the great ends which Satan has constantly in view, and

for accomplishing which, among other means, he has recourse, as we have seen, to those difficulties which have hitherto so much obstructed your progress.

Let me now, in discharge of my promise, apply these remarks to the point referred to in one of your letters. Does not this view, imperfect though it may be, of the visible and the invisible church of Christ, furnish an answer to those objections which, according to your representation, you frequently hear advanced against certain preachers of the word of God? They are accused of preaching in a censorious and an uncharitable tone, and of addressing Christian congregations in language, which implies that they consider a large portion of their auditors as involved in the guilt and ignorance of heathenism. They are accused of making unfounded and invidious distinctions between those who adhere to their own peculiar notions, and the great mass of the respectable religious community; and

even of applying to the latter the same terms and expressions, which St. Paul applied to the Gentiles before their conversion to Christianity.

But what, let me ask you, is the office of the preacher of the Gospel? Is he not a minister of Christ to his church? It is true indeed that as there are Christians, who are such only by name and profession; so there may be ministers, who are ministers only by name and profession. But I here speak of the *true* ministers of Christ. And what is his office but to minister to the true church? To establish and purify this church, to build up its members in their most holy faith, to provide them with sound doctrine and suitable consolations, to warn them of danger, and to go before them in the way; this, doubtless, is an important and essential part of the office assigned to him. But it is not the only part. He is to seek also the increase and enlargement of this church. He

must endeavour to be made instrumental in the hand of the Spirit for translating souls out of the visible into the invisible church of Christ; for converting nominal into real Christians; for turning formal professors into spiritual believers. And how is he to discharge this momentous part of his work? When he looks round on the congregations, whom he may be called to address, and has reason to fear, that a portion, and probably even a large portion of them, may as yet be members only of the visible church; that strangers to spiritual religion, they may yet be deceiving themselves with the hope of being Christians, and of their title to the promises and privileges of Christianity: how, I ask, under these circumstances is the true minister of Christ to act? Is he to countenance such persons in their fatal delusion? Is he to tell them, that they are already Christians, and need only a little additional improvement and elevation of character? Is he to dis-

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pense to them the same encouragements and consolations, which he would give to the real people of God? Is he to lead the mere formal professors of Christianity to believe, that they are equally entitled with the spiritual worshippers of God to the promises and privileges of the Gospel? Is he to inculcate the practice of evangelical obedience on those, whom he believes to be as yet utterly destitute of evangelical principles? And by such a mode of instruction is he to encourage a presumption, that in their present state they are capable of discharging any duty aright, or of rendering to God any measure of acceptable service? I think you must be sensible that if he should act thus, he would betray his trust, prove unfaithful to his charge, and be the instrument of misleading his flock. You must be sensible that if he would perform the office of a faithful steward, and would rightly divide the word of truth, he must be *distinguishing*

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in his preaching; he must draw a clear line of separation between the nominal and the real servants of Christ; and while he consoles and encourages the latter, he must solemnly warn the former of their danger, and pointedly set before them the only means of escape. He must distinctly show them, if he would benefit their souls, that notwithstanding their profession of religion, they really stand in need of that great spiritual change, which is the very foundation and commencement of true piety in the heart, and without which all pretensions to religion are vain. Whether he calls this change by the term, regeneration, conversion, or renovation, (for it is not the term, but the thing signified by it, for which in fact he contends,) he must insist on the absolute necessity of the change itself: he must point out its spiritual nature, and the scriptural tests, by which its existence and genuineness are ascertained; and must faithfully represent

sent all, who have not undergone this change, as utterly incapable of serving God in the Gospel of his Son, and of participating in the spiritual duties and legitimate pleasures of true Christianity.

Such must be the line of his preaching: such the tenour of his instructions. But that preaching of this description will give offence, is a consequence which must be expected. The nominal professors of Christianity will doubtless be offended at statements, which disturb their self-complacency, wound their pride, and subvert the foundation of their hopes. They will no more endure to be told of the vanity and emptiness of their religious profession, than the Pharisees of old endured to be told the same truths; and will be ready to say to the preacher of these doctrines, "Are we blind also?"— But mark the difference which appears, whenever the change, of which we have been speaking, really takes place in a person of this character. Enlightened from

from above to discern the spirituality of true religion, with Saul of Tarsus, he now earnestly espouses the truths, which he had before opposed. With the apostle, what things were gain, he now counts loss for Christ; and feelingly exclaims, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are past away; behold, all things are become new."

I trust, that you are indeed a partaker of this spiritual change, and consequently one of the Israel of God. If this supposition be right, I am sure that you will cordially unite with me in praying that the Lord of the harvest will send forth his labourers into his harvest: that He will increase the number of his true ministers among us; and will bless their faithful preaching of his word to the enlargement and edification of his *invisible* church, by "turning sinners from darkness unto light," and by "building up his people in their most holy faith."

I am, &c.

LETTER XIV.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

ANOTHER subject, which in these days has greatly occupied the attention and divided the opinions of mankind, is the Bible-Society. On this subject, indeed, you do not feel the same difficulty as on some of the other topics, to which in the course of our correspondence we have adverted. You declare that you cannot attach much weight to the objections, which have been urged against this institution. At the same time, as there are so many opposite opinions afloat on the utility and probable consequences of the Bible-Society, you have requested me to assist you in forming your views on these points by a communication of my own sentiments respecting them: a request, with

which I shall the more readily comply, as this is a subject, on which of all others, I never reflect without the most lively sensations of thankfulness and joy. I am thankful that I live in an age, when such a Society has been formed. I am thankful for the support and patronage, which it has received. I rejoice in its present success, and in its future prospects; in the good which it has already accomplished, and in the blessings which it promises to diffuse. How little do those persons, who oppose this institution, or who feel indifferent to its interests, suspect the satisfaction and delight which it is capable of imparting, and which they are willingly foregoing! I am aware, indeed, that language of this kind may be used in praise of any favourite pursuit or object: and consequently that it is not the mere using of such language, which can carry conviction to another's mind. I will therefore state to you the grounds on which I use it. I will specify what are those views

views of the Bible-Society, which make it to me a source of so many grateful and pleasureable sensations.

I am accustomed to consider this institution, in the first place, in connection with the world at large. To a mind enlightened by Christian hopes, and habituated to contemplate objects in reference to unseen and eternal things, the world at large presents a scene of the most interesting and painful kind. Unnumbered millions of our fellow-beings, created like ourselves for immortality, are seen plunged in the deepest shades of spiritual darkness; bound down under the iron bondage of Satan; wholly enslaved to the lusts and appetites of their fallen nature; and cut off from the means by which they might emerge out of this aweful state of ignorance and misery. In the expressive language of the Apostle, they are "without Christ, aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."

world," In this condition, destitute of the blessings, consolations, and privileges which Christianity provides; devoid of all the alleviation and support, which it administers under the afflictions and sufferings of our common nature, they are *now living*. In this condition they are daily dying, and passing away into an eternal state. And what emotions does this sight inspire? Can it be viewed without compassion? Can it be contemplated without awakening a tender sympathy, without exciting an earnest desire of imparting to them the sovereign remedy, which alone can ameliorate their condition, and can elevate them to the same hopes and prospects with ourselves? Surely not. For till the Gospel, through which life and immortality have been brought to light, shall be communicated to them, they must pine in hopeless misery and perish in utter darkness.

Nor are they the Heathen nations only, to which the spirit of these remarks applies.

applies. Let us look at that more distinguished portion of the earth, which enjoys the light of revelation, and we shall perceive, that even here the blessings of Christianity are frequently more nominal than real; and that even in those favoured countries, on which the Sun of Righteousness appears to have arisen, darkness still covers the earth, and gross darkness the people. Corruption in doctrine and practice, superstition, and idolatry still debase and bind down the souls of men, and render them, though Christians in profession, little better than Heathens in their character and hopes. And where shall we look for a cure of these extensive and malignant evils, except in that reformation of religion, which can be effectually produced only by a more intimate acquaintance with the word of God? The same divine truth, which alone can dissipate heathen ignorance, alone can purify anti-Christian corruption.

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With what other feelings, then, than those of thankfulness and joy, can a mind, which is alive to the spiritual wants and miseries of mankind, regard the establishment and progress of a Society, whose professed and only object is to disseminate into every kingdom of the world, the Scriptures of truth: a Society, whose beneficent objects will never be accomplished, till not a nation, not a tribe, not a family shall exist in the habitable globe, but shall hear and read in its own language the wonderful works of God? Surely there is something divine in the conception of such a plan. It must have proceeded from Him, "from whom all good counsels come." The simplicity, the majesty, the benevolence of the design; the glory, which it brings to God; the peace, which it promotes on earth; the good-will, which it breathes to man; all evince its heavenly origin. They mark its affinity to those characteristic instruments, with which

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" in sundry times and in divers manners," the Almighty has effectually interposed for the introduction or the revival, for the increase or the purification of his true religion upon earth. The astonishing success of this institution, so surpassing all the previous calculations of its most sanguine admirers; the rapidity, with which it has diffused itself from kingdom to kingdom, from clime to clime; the almost simultaneous multiplication of its various ramifications in every quarter of the world; the interest, which it has excited; the zeal, which it has called forth; the energies, which it has roused; all unite in bearing testimony to the same truth, and in filling the mind with pleasing anticipations of the great and glorious works, which it is destined to accomplish. Already, in contemplating the future operations of this mighty engine, we may look forward in hope to the most important results. Already, we may see the shades of Heathenism and idolatry,

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of superstition and corruption, vanishing before the dawn of that resplendent day, in which the sun will no more go down. Already may we seem to realize those glorious scenes, which, if not delineated by the pencil of inspiration, we should assign to the regions rather of fiction than of truth, when "the wilderness shall be a fruitful field," and "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose;" when "the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped;" when "the lame man shall leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing;" for "in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert; and the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water:" when "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain" of the Lord; for "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of

of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

One beneficial consequence, naturally resulting from the institution of Bible-Societies, appears to me peculiarly striking and interesting. By means of them a new bond of union is formed between the nations, — a bond of a nature and tendency very different from any thing, which the world has hitherto witnessed. And who can estimate the influence which it may hereafter acquire and exert over their mutual feelings and dispositions towards each other. When so many thousands of individuals, though separated by natural boundaries, and no less widely distinguished by national habits and prejudices, yet cordially unite in promoting one single object, and that object, the dissemination of religious truth; who does not see that such an unity of design and operation connects them together by a tie as powerful as it is novel? Who does not see that, as

their numbers are augmented, and as the principles by which they are actuated, prevail, a mutually increasing regard and sympathy with each other will be generated, which cannot fail to have a corresponding effect on their reciprocal conduct and intercourse? And even though dissension and hostility among nations should not, by these means, be altogether extinguished; yet a direct influence will be exerted in mitigating the animosity, and not improbably in abridging the duration of warfare. The promotion of peace may be expected as a legitimate consequence from the diffusion of the Gospel of peace.

But the world at large is not the only object, in relation to which I contemplate the Bible-Society as a source of thankfulness and joy. I more especially regard it in this light, as associated and connected with our own native land. That the Almighty, in vouchsafing so great a blessing to the nations, should have

have selected this country as the privileged spot from whence His light should emanate, and his mercy be diffused, is a circumstance which produces in my mind sensations of peculiar gratitude and delight. Cordially as I have participated in the triumphs and achievements of Britain, yet no honour to which she has attained in all her glorious career has given me such heartfelt gratification as the renown which she has acquired from having given birth to the Bible-Society;—a renown which will decorate and immortalize her name, when all her most splendid victories will be remembered no more. I truly love my country; and how then can I fail of deeply rejoicing at an event, which has so conspicuously exalted her among the nations; and which has called forth from every quarter of the world, so many testimonies to her disinterested benevolence, so many expressions of obligation and gratitude towards her, so many

prayers and thanksgivings on her behalf? When I peruse the reports and correspondence of the British and Foreign Bible-Society, and perceive the incalculable benefits to mankind which it is made the instrument of disseminating through such a variety of channels, I feel a conscious elevation of mind at the thoughts of belonging to a country, on which such a high and distinguished privilege has been conferred.

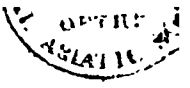
This, however, is not the only or the principal ground of the satisfaction, which I experience on her account. It is not merely in the distinction to which she has been raised, that I rejoice, but in the consequences to which I humbly hope it may lead. I cannot but look upon this peculiar mark of the Divine favour as an intimation and an earnest of future and still greater blessings in store. Since "the gifts and callings of God are without repentance;" since He has been pleased to designate our country

country to the important office of dispensing his bounty to other lands; since He has disposed so many hearts among us to concur in this merciful design, and with zeal and liberality to come forward in its support; may we not without presumption hope, that He will not forget this work and labour of love, but in His gracious dealings with us will cause us to feel the truth of His own declaration, that "it is more blessed to give than to receive?" May we not say with the wife of Manoah, "If the Lord were pleased to destroy us, He would not have received a burnt-offering, and a meat-offering at our hands?" This reflection appears to me peculiarly consolatory in our present arduous circumstances. Confessedly great are our national difficulties. The swell which has followed the storm, threatens to be more dangerous, than even the tempest itself, which preceded it. But if the Lord be with us in the vessel, we need

not fear, but that He will preserve it from sinking, and will guide it at length into the wished-for haven. He will say to the winds and waves, "Be still;" and there will be "a great calm."

There is, indeed, in this instance, the same natural connection between our labours of love and the blessings to be expected from them, which, in the established providence of God, subsists between cause and effect. It is his appointment that no one ever heartily exerts himself in a good work, without himself deriving good from the exertion. A very little observation will show us the truth of this remark, in respect to the Bible-Society. Its obvious tendency is to benefit those who take an active part in its concerns: and experience, in this case, verifies the declaration of Solomon, "He that watereth, shall be watered also himself." The effects which this institution has already produced among us, are highly important and salutary. Witness

that



that encreased and encreasing interest, which it nurtures and disseminates on subjects connected with the word of God. Witness that spirit of union and concord, which it has tended to promote among the different denominations of Christians, by providing them with a common ground, in which they may occasionally associate, and together indulge their benevolent affections and sympathies; in which they may act in unison without any compromise of their respective feelings and principles; in which they may learn to lay aside their mutual prejudices, and to discover, to appreciate, and to respect, "whatsoever things are true, and honest, and just, and pure, and lovely, and of good report" in the character and conduct of each other. Witness that reformation of morals, those habits of industry and œconomy, and that improved attention to religious duties, which have been constantly found in a greater or less degree

to result from one very important branch of the Bible establishment, the Penny-Societies. If any one can read the Reports of the Southwark Associations, without a deep conviction of the paramount utility of those institutions, without lively feelings of gratitude and joy, such a person may reasonably question his title to the name both of Patriot and of Christian.

I think you will accord with me in all these sentiments; and

I am, &c.

LETTER XV.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

In my last letter I stated the grounds of those pleasurable sensations, with which I contemplate the progress and operations of the Bible-Society. These sensations, however, are not altogether without alloy. While I rejoice in this noble institution as it stands related to the world at large, and to our own country in particular, there is yet one object, in connection with which I view it under very different impressions: and that object is our National Church.

As a member, and especially as a minister, of the Church of England, I feel no less jealous for her honour, than anxious for her safety: but I must freely confess, that when I view her situation

in reference to the Bible-Society, I tremble for the consequences to both. It appears to me that her honour as well as her safety are alike exposed to no inconsiderable danger.

There is, in truth, a natural and radical alliance between our Church and the Bible-Society; for they both are founded on the same acknowledged principle, that "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation." In its object, also, the Bible-Society has a very close affinity with our Church, and in a peculiar manner lays claim to her countenance and support. For it is to that diffusion of the Scriptures, which the Bible-Society is established to promote, that the Church of England is indebted even for her very existence. It was through the diffusion of the Scriptures that she was emancipated from the dominion of Papal corruption, and has attained to that soundness of faith, and purity of doctrine, by which she has been so long and so eminently

ly distinguished among the reformed churches. Nor is the spirit by which the Bible-Society is animated, less congenial with that which the Church of England breathes and inspires. For while the *one* teaches her members to pray that God "would be pleased to make known his saving health unto all nations;" that He would "have mercy on all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Heretics;" that He would "take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of his word, and so fetch them home to his flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one Shepherd:" the *other* proceeds actively to exert itself in accordance with these petitions, and to take practical measures for accomplishing the object of them. When, therefore, a society was formed for the express and exclusive purpose of disseminating the Holy Scriptures; of sending forth the written word of God, not only

into every corner of our own country, but into every nation of the world, whether Christian, Mahometan, or Heathen; in what light might it have been antecedently expected, that the Church of England would regard such an institution? If she acted consistently with her principles, responsibilities, and professions, with what dispositions might it have been hoped that she would witness its rise and progress, its operations and success? Surely it might have been expected that she would regard such a society in the most favourable light and with the most friendly dispositions? It might have been hoped that she would instantly recognise it as a most valuable ally, and would promptly support it with all her energies.

But experience has proved how little such hopes and anticipations would have been realized. Events have shown that the Church of England has not thus regarded and supported the Bible-Society.

Of

Of her laity, indeed, of her princes, her nobles, and her commonalty, great numbers have come forward in aid of this institution, and have enrolled themselves in the lists of its patrons and advocates: while among the clergy, of every rank and station, not a few have distinguished themselves in the same cause, and have espoused it with a zeal correspondent to their sacred character. But notwithstanding these exceptions, the Church of England, *as a body*, cannot be considered as having displayed a friendly disposition to the Bible-Society. A large proportion of her ecclesiastical members, her prelates, and dignitaries, and parochial ministers, have taken no share in the proceedings of this institution; have neither attended its meetings, nor contributed to its funds. Nay, whatever opposition and hostility have been manifested against its constitution or operations, have proceeded almost exclusively from the same quarter. It is only, so far as I am aware,

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in episcopal charges and visitation-sermons, in volumes and pamphlets written by the *clergy*, that any regular and systematic attempt has been made to check the progress and to defeat the objects of this Society. The attempt, indeed, has proved, as it was likely to prove, ineffectual. But still it strongly marks the dispositions and wishes of those, who have engaged in it. It shows that they have been actuated by a spirit of disaffection to the Bible-Society: and though it is true that none but the writers are directly responsible for the sentiments which they have advanced, yet the conduct of the clergy in general, with respect to this institution, clearly evinces their agreement with the tenor and spirit of these publications.

In stating, indeed, the indisposition which the Church of England, as represented at least by the great body of its ecclesiastical members, manifests towards the Bible-Society, 'I am not sensible that

I am

I am stating any thing which in their own view stands in need either of proof or apology. The fact itself is a matter of too much notoriety to be denied; and, indeed, is often appealed to by many of themselves, as a cause of congratulation, and as a justification of their own conduct in keeping at a distance from the concerns of this institution.

But it is this state of things which I regard with uneasiness and apprehension. I am strongly attached to the Church of England. I love her no less for her own sake, than for the sake of that noble army of martyrs and confessors, by whose blood her foundations were cemented, and in whose spirit her articles, homilies, and liturgy were framed. I regard her as primitive in her institutions, evangelical in her doctrines, and highly devotional and spiritual in all her services. I look upon her as admirably designed and adapted for building up the invisible Church of Christ; and I believe that through

through her instrumentality many of her children attain to an elevation of character, and to a holiness of heart and life, which the members of no other church can exceed. I am not, however, so blind or devoted an admirer of her excellencies as to say that she is utterly without imperfection, or might not possibly be capable of any improvement. I know that as a human institution she can have no just pretensions either to infallibility or perfection. But I believe that in respect both to her principles and institutions, her blemishes, compared with her excellencies, are like spots on the face of the sun. They neither disfigure her appearance, nor diminish her lustre, nor impair her usefulness. I would fondly indulge the hope that she is destined to act even a more conspicuous part, than she has hitherto performed in the Church of Christ; and that, having passed through such intermediate stages of discipline and chastisement as may be necessary for her

her greater purification and enlargement, she will hereafter shine out with a still more resplendent brightness; and, stretching forth the curtains of her habitations, will lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes, and break forth on the right hand and on the left.

Exhilarating, however, as are these anticipations of her future glory, and highly justifiable as they may appear, when considered with an aspect to her pure and spiritual character, they are yet greatly checked by the circumstances to which I have alluded. I cannot regard the opposition which the Church of England has been made the instrument of manifesting towards the Bible-Society—an opposition so at variance with her principles, so inconsistent with her professions—without sensibly feeling, that every step which she is thus constrained to take in this disastrous and inauspicious path, is in a direction the very contrary to that elevation of honour and prosperity,

sperity, to which my imagination and my wishes would anxiously conduct her. Do her members reflect on the spectacle which she now exhibits in the sight, on the contrast which she now presents to the conduct, of the other Protestant Churches of Europe? Are *they* all cordially united, are *they* all zealously engaged in the great work of circulating the Scriptures, through the medium of Bible-Societies? and does the Church of England stand aloof from this great design? Is *she* so wholly engrossed with her own domestic concerns, as to have no heart to feel for the spiritual wants of other countries, no hand to be stretched out in their relief? Does *she* refuse to raise her standard in this holy crusade against infidelity, superstition and idolatry? What, I ask, must be the feelings of the Protestant churches respecting her at such an exhibition? Must they not be ready to conclude that she has renounced her principles, has relinquished

her

her professions, and has voluntarily descended from that lofty eminence, which she so long has occupied among the Churches of Christ? Surely it will be as difficult to obviate this conclusion, as it is painful to admit it. Her friends may deeply lament this stain on her glory; but how can they wipe it away?

Take another view of the subject. Many are the countries which, in every quarter of the world, at this moment feel and acknowledge their obligations to the British and Foreign Bible-Society. They look to England as the nation, through whose piety, liberality, and Christian sympathy, they have received those waters of life, which now gladden and refresh the once thirsty and barren wilderness. England is the country which they hail and bless as their friend and benefactor. 'To *your Nation*,' they say, 'we are 'indebted for a blessing, which binds 'her to us by the strongest ties. We 'owe to her the Bible, and all the hopes

'and

'and prospects which the Bible gives to 'us.' 'But to *your Church,*' they may as truly add, 'we are under no such 'obligation; we owe her nothing. Some 'noble exceptions, indeed, have been 'found among her children: but, as a 'body, she felt not for our wants; she 'aided not the efforts of those who were 'ministering unto them. She listened 'not to our voice, when we exclaimed, 'Come over and help us.'

How keenly must it wound the heart of every true friend of our Church to see her exposed to such reproaches as these; to see her subjected to such an invidious distinction as that which this language imports; as if she were separated from the country to which she belongs; as if in the noblest of all causes, her interests, her objects, her pursuits, were not identified with those of the nation at large! If I rejoice at the honour to which I see my *Country* exalted, I cannot but deeply deplore

deplore the dishonour which thus attaches to my *Church.*

I said also that I was equally apprehensive for her *safety.* Her situation with respect to the Bible-Society appears to me to place her in circumstances peculiarly critical and perilous. I truly hope that my alarm may be groundless: but in a subsequent letter I will further disclose to you my views on this subject.

I am, &c.

LETTER XVI.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

THE alledged cause of that indisposition to the Bible-Society, to which I referred in my last letter, is an apprehension of its tendency to injure and undermine the Established Church. But however strongly such a tendency may have been insisted on by some of her ecclesiastical members, and the apprehension of it may seem to have been felt by others, I cannot be persuaded that this cause has really operated to any great extent towards producing the effect ascribed to it. In my opinion we must look for some other solution to this phenomenon.

There is indeed something to my mind revulsive, and almost monstrous in the supposition, that a society, whose sole

and

and exclusive object is the dissimination of the Word of God, can prove detrimental to the establishment of a church, which is built solely and exclusively on that Word. The very reverse would be the primary and obvious suggestion. We should naturally suppose that the more widely the Scriptures are diffused, the more firmly such a church would be established. At least, before a contrary conclusion could be admitted, a very strong case must be made out, and arguments the most clear and convincing must be adduced. But what case of this nature has been made out? What arguments of this description have been adduced in the present instance? Confident assertions, unsupported by proof; reproductions of supposed facts, which had been demonstrated not to exist; insinuations, surmises, and predictions have been the weapons for the most part employed in defence of the hypothesis, that the Bible-Society, in its constitution

or operations, will be injurious to the national Church. And can we believe that a body of men so learned, so acute, so informed, as are the clergy of the Church of England, could really be imposed on by such arguments, and not discover the weakness and fallacy of such attempts to pervert their judgement? Or even if we could bring ourselves to suppose, that the novelty of the statements might at first sight surprise them into a temporary admission of their truth, or that the peculiar nature of the charge, by addressing itself to their prejudices, might for a season mislead them; yet let us remember that answers the most clear and argumentative, that refutations the most plain and circumstantial, have from time to time been produced by the friends of the Bible-Society. And can we imagine that the weight of these answers and refutations has not been felt by the great bulk of the opponent party?—And what have facts and experience proved?

After a lapse of ten years, have any of the predicted evils to the national Church been realised? Have any of the forebodings and insinuations been justified by the events? Has the circulation of the Prayer Book been diminished? Have fewer tracts been dispersed by the Church-members of the Bible-Society? Has any explosion taken place? Have any plots been discovered? Has the *unnatural* union, as it has been termed, between Churchmen and Dissenters, produced any of those portentous consequences which it was so confidently urged would result from it? It is notorious that none of these things have occurred. The prophecies have hitherto altogether failed. The unsoundness of the original hypothesis has been so far demonstrated by the undeniable evidence of facts; but what effect has this additional testimony produced on the opposers of the Bible-Society? Have the smaller number, on the one hand, who took the lead in the

controversy, retracted their statements and acknowledged their errors? Or have the larger body, on the other hand, who appeared to be convinced by these statements, renounced their conviction, and expressed themselves friendly to the Bible-Society? Nothing of this kind has been done. The apathy of the one party, and the hostility of the other, still continue without any visible alteration. And it is this view of the subject which compels me to believe that with regard to a very considerable portion of the opponents to the Bible-Society, no real dread of ill consequences to the Church was ever permanently felt; but that their opposition is to be traced to some other cause. For however those who first took part in the alarm might be convinced of the truth of their prognostics; however their judgement may still continue to be perverted by the bias, which the heat of conflict, and the influence of committed opinion naturally produce; such causes

could not operate upon the minds of the great bulk, who have not personally engaged in the controversy. Though they partook in the first alarm, and might apprehend some foundation for the arguments by which it was supposed to be justified, yet *they* have been at liberty calmly to contemplate the result, to witness the real effects, and to judge how far their anticipations have been verified. *They*, at least, have been free from the heat and prejudice of a party publicly assumed, from undue predisposition to a cause espoused before the world. Whatever good there has been in the Bible-Society, as furthering the great cause of Christianity, has been before their eyes, and certainly has offered a strong inducement to minds solicitous for the promotion of piety, to co-operate in its labours of love. When, therefore, under these circumstances, I still see the same indifference manifested by so large a portion of the members of the Established

Church towards the Bible-Society, I cannot but greatly fear, with whatever reluctance I am brought to admit the supposition, that this indifference really proceeds from an indifference to the great objects which that society embraces; from a want of lively feeling in the spiritual interests of mankind at large; from a deficiency of zeal for promoting the universal kingdom of the Redeemer. I would at least, with all deference and humility, submit it to the conscientious consideration of every individual who is indisposed towards the Bible-Society, whether at the bottom of his indisposition there may not be a latent and unsuspected portion of this indifference to the great cause of Christianity?

There are several additional circumstances which to my mind strongly indicate the prevalency of such an indifference in a large number of those who dissent from the Bible-Society.

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In the first place, in all the arguments which have been publicly advanced against this institution, and which have been adopted as their general ground of justification by its opposers, *its domestic operations*, which are rather an incidental part of its plan than its primary object, have been brought almost exclusively into view. That grand and comprehensive portion of its design, the translation and dissemination of the Scriptures into all languages and countries, has usually been passed over in total silence, or if noticed, noticed only with coldness; or at the best, with a very measured share of approbation. Now this surely would not have been the case, had the heart been duly alive to the spiritual wants of mankind. Had there been a chord in the soul corresponding to this part of the Society's object, it must surely have vibrated in unison with it. Whatever apprehensions might have been felt as to the prejudicial influence of its

domestic exertions, still they could not have so entirely chilled the vital warmth, had it really existed within, as to prevent it from occasionally kindling into a glow of sacred ardour in the contemplation of those diffusive blessings, which the Society's foreign operations involve.

Another of the circumstances to which I alluded, is the apology very frequently made by members of the Established Church for declining to unite themselves to the Bible-Society, and which is couched in the following terms: 'We 'belong to a different society; a society, 'which is competent to supply *our* 'wants and to answer *our* purposes. 'One society is sufficient for *us*; and *we* 'see no occasion for another.' Surely language of this kind too evidently betrays an indication of the indifference of which I am speaking. Those who use it, clearly show that they do not widely extend their spiritual views beyond their own church and country. If they were

were anxiously desirous of making known the saving health of Christianity unto all nations, they could not say that the Society alluded to (the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge) is competent to answer their wishes and purposes. For with the exception of the superintendance of the Indian mission, nearly the whole labours of that venerable Society are necessarily confined to domestic operations. Those, then, who restrict their support to that Society, merely on the ground that it is *sufficient for them*, plainly demonstrate that they are at least practically indifferent to the religious wants of the rest of the world.

In the third place, if a zeal for the propagation of Christianity in foreign nations does vitally and powerfully operate in the members of the national Church, there is an opportunity opened for their exertions, which is not clogged with any of those objections, to which

they may consider the Bible-Society exposed. There is in existence an institution, which is composed only of members of the Church of England, and which takes no part in any domestic concerns whatever, — I mean, the Church Missionary Society. In assisting the efforts of this institution to promote Christianity in Africa and in the East, the members of the Established Church might manifest their zeal without any apprehensions for the safety of the Establishment, and might securely gratify their desire of enlarging the kingdom of their Redeemer. When, therefore, I see that the same large proportion of those, who are unfriendly to the Bible-Institution, are in general no better disposed towards the Church Missionary Society, what is the conclusion which forces itself on my mind, but that an indifference to the great objects of these institutions at present too plainly characterises many members

bers of the Established Church, and accounts for that indisposition to the Bible-Society which I am deploring.

Think not that I have any pleasure in coming to this conclusion. I admit it with reluctance. I state it with pain. Thankful indeed should I be, if it could be disproved in that way in which alone it can be satisfactorily disproved, by a *practical* refutation. Joyful should I feel if every member of the Establishment would spontaneously come forward and evince by his *conduct* that I have utterly mistaken the case: but till something of this kind be done, I must be compelled, however unwillingly, to retain my opinion. But I retain it also with fear; for it opens to me a prospect in a high degree aweful and alarming. For if our Church, however pure in doctrine and principle, be yet chargeable in the persons of those who constitute the great body of her members, with the guilt of indifference to the general cause of Christianity, how

precarious is her situation; how imminent her danger! If she thus partake of Laodicean lukewarmness, what can she expect but Laodicean treatment? If forgetful of her duties, her obligations, and her privileges, she has left her first love, what can she anticipate, except she repent, but that her candlestick will be removed out of its place? Let her remember *Who* hath said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me, scattereth." Let her remember that if she comes not out of Babylon, she will perish with Babylon. If she partakes of its sins, she will also receive of its plagues. Let her remember that the only ecclesiastical power which has yet opposed or discountenanced the free circulation of the Word of God, has been the Church of Rome. And shall the Church of England, in such an opposition, unite and identify herself with One, whom she regards as anti-Christian and apostate? Shall she prominently

minently stand forward the opposer of an institution, which strikes at the root of papal corruption, and aims a deadly blow at heathenism and idolatry? Does she not see that, by such a conduct, she is undermining also her own foundations, and bringing herself down to the ground! Would that the voice of an humble individual might be heard! Would that the ecclesiastical members of our Establishment might be prevailed on calmly and dispassionately to reflect on the probable consequences of their hostility or indifference to the Bible-Society!

What is the basis on which our Church is established? She stands not by prescription. She is indeed supported by law. But her foundations are laid in the hearts and affections of the people; in their admiration of her excellence; in their conviction of her expediency and fitness for the great end for which she is established — the support and enlarge-

ment of the kingdom of Christ. Let these foundations be once removed, and where are the buttresses which are to prevent her from falling? Let the affections of the people be estranged from her; let them cease to admire her; let them regard her as useless: and what power on earth can sustain her? We might wrap ourselves up in the consciousness of our own superior dignity, and might shut our ears against clamour and complaint: but the foundations of our Zion would in the mean time be crumbling away beneath our feet, and would quickly bury us in the ruins. These are plain but serious truths, which, as churchmen, we ought fully to meet, and deeply to consider. And then let us attend to the following question.

Is any conduct on the part of the Church more likely to estrange from her the hearts of the people, and to lower her in their esteem and admiration, than her conduct in respect to the Bible-Society?

Society? Whatever the Church may think or determine on the subject, the Bible-Society has already taken hold of the hearts of the people. It addresses itself to their understandings, to their consciences, to their feelings. Sophistry and metaphysics have no weight with them. They form their judgement from facts, and will draw their conclusions from such premises as are obviously presented to their notice. They will naturally conclude that those who are unfriendly to a society whose only professed object is to circulate the Bible, are unfriendly to the Bible itself. They will neither attend to nor understand the distinctions, by which it may be attempted to disprove this conclusion. They will assume it as a truth, which is plain to their senses, and which no reasoning can set aside. And what will be the next step in their progress? If those whom they judge to be unfriendly to the Bible

are uniformly found to be members, especially ministers, of the national Church, they will necessarily infer that the principles of the Church itself are unfriendly to the Bible. They will associate in their ideas the Church and the Bible as at variance one with the other. And need I suggest to you the effect which such an association must produce on their minds? Is there any association, which the friends of the Establishment should more earnestly deprecate, or more studiously labour to counteract? Is there any association, which could tend more directly to fill the minds of those who entertain it with prejudices unfavourable to the Church, to alienate their affections from her, to sink her in their esteem, and to make them more than indifferent to her interests? That such an effect is partially begun, I feel no doubt: and that it will continue to spread, if occasion be given to it, can be

as little questioned. Its progress, indeed, may be silent; but it will be sure, and probably will not be slow. The Bible-Society is making rapid advances among the population of the country; and its influence cannot long be concealed or unfelt. Oh! that the clergy of the Establishment, instead of standing neuter in this great concern; instead of attempting to damp a flame which they cannot even smother, much less extinguish; instead of manifesting a feeble hostility, and holding up an impotent arm, would feel their responsibilities in this momentous crisis of their fate, and act with a decision and energy corresponding to the aweful circumstances in which they are now placed! Every facility is at present afforded them of recovering all the time and ground which may have been already lost. Let them throw the weight of their influence, of their patronage, and of their support, into the cause of the Bible-

Bible-Society; and they will find their own importance increased, their means of usefulness enlarged, and the popular attachment to the Established Church strengthened and confirmed. But let them remember that no further time is to be wasted. The vessel is on her way. Her sails are set: the wind and the tide are with her. Let them not delay to cast themselves on board, and share her fortunes. Let them take the helm, which will be readily conceded to their hands. And thus steering her through the glorious course which she is destined to pursue, may they participate in the honour, the satisfaction, and the reward of having been instrumental in distributing to distant lands, and to ages yet unborn, "the unsearchable riches of Christ!" May He, who hath all hearts in his hands, dispose them to this work and labour of love, and prosper and bless them in the performance of it, to the

the increasing prosperity and glory of His Universal Church, and to the stability and enlargement of that favoured part of it, to which they themselves belong!

I am, &c.

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